

# WIDA FOCUS ON Differentiation PART 2

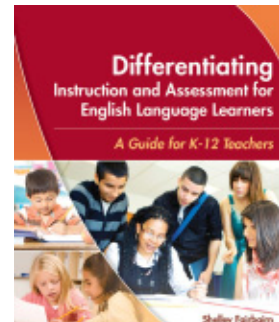


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## Introduction

This Bulletin represents the second and final part of WIDA's Focus on Differentiation. In Part 1 (May 2012), we explored how teachers can differentiate instruction for the English language learners (ELLs) in their classrooms by following a helpful planning template adapted from Shelley Fairbairn and Stephanie Jones-Vo's book, *Differentiating Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners: A Guide for K-12 Teachers*. Using the example of Mr. Nelson's fifth grade general education classroom, we demonstrated in Part 1 how to establish appropriate standards-based content and language objectives for a lesson while maintaining consistently high expectations for all his students' content learning. Mr. Nelson accomplished this by identifying specific **scaffolds** and **supports** that he could implement for each of his ELLs, Marco, Julia, and Amitabh, during a lesson on rainforests. This Bulletin will examine what it looks like for Mr. Nelson to put these strategies and tools, such as graphic organizers, parental involvement, and flexible grouping, into practice. Lastly, we will showcase how Mr. Nelson evaluates his students' performances in both content and language on their rainforest assignment.



## DEFINITIONS:

**SCAFFOLD:** an educator's intentional act of building upon students' already acquired skills and knowledge to teach new skills

**SUPPORT:** use of instructional strategies or tools used to assist students in accessing content necessary for classroom understanding or communication and to help construct meaning from language

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Here is a reminder of each sample ELL student’s background and characteristics:

MARCO, LEVEL 1 ELL	JULIA, LEVEL 3 ELL	AMITABH, LEVEL 3 ELL
<p><b>Born:</b> in Brazil</p> <p><b>Home language:</b> Brazilian Portuguese</p> <p><b>Home language skills:</b> can read and write in Portuguese, but probably below grade level</p> <p><b>Enrolled in U.S. schools:</b> earlier this year</p> <p><b>Educational background:</b> 4 years of schooling in Brazil at 3 different schools with frequent absences</p> <p><b>Background in English:</b> informal exposure outside of school</p> <p><b>Placement test scores:</b> Level 1 Listening Level 1 Speaking Level 1 Reading Level 1 Writing</p>	<p><b>Born:</b> in U.S.</p> <p><b>Home language:</b> Mexican Spanish</p> <p><b>Home language skills:</b> informal speaking and listening, does not read or write in Spanish</p> <p><b>Enrolled in U.S. schools:</b> in Kindergarten</p> <p><b>Educational background:</b> 5.5 years in U.S. school</p> <p><b>Background in English:</b> lifelong exposure within and outside school</p> <p><b>ACCESS for ELLs test scores:</b> Level 5 Listening Level 4 Speaking Level 3 Reading Level 2 Writing</p>	<p><b>Born:</b> in India</p> <p><b>Home language:</b> Gujarati</p> <p><b>Home language skills:</b> unknown</p> <p><b>Enrolled in U.S. schools:</b> in the middle of last year (4th grade)</p> <p><b>Educational background:</b> 3.5 years of consistent schooling in India, 1 year in U.S. school</p> <p><b>Background in English:</b> 3.5 years of British English instruction with little practice in oral language</p> <p><b>ACCESS for ELLs test scores:</b> Level 2 Listening Level 1 Speaking Level 4 Reading Level 5 Writing</p>

## Building on student strengths

Mr. Nelson knows that although Marco and Julia are both beginning writers in English, they have very different content area knowledge as well as oral language and literacy in English and in their home languages. Likewise, Amitabh has a different set of skills and strengths that can facilitate his growth. Mr. Nelson looks for creative ways to support the engagement and learning of all three ELL students in his class.

Using the strength-based language of the WIDA Can Do Descriptors, Mr. Nelson focuses on what Julia can do with oral language in English to scaffold her literacy development in English. Instructional conversations, books on tape, videos, oral-written retellings, and the language experience approach are all powerful strategies that Mr. Nelson uses for this purpose. These strategies also benefit all students in his class who have strong oral language in social English but are continually developing their grade-level academic literacy skills. These ideas represent some ways that Mr. Nelson differentiates his instruction and assessment not only for ELLs, but also for all of the diverse learners in his class.

Julia’s teacher can help her achieve the language and content objectives of the lesson by using a T-chart graphic organizer as an instructional scaffold. The T-chart can assist Julia in meeting the expectations that she will describe, compare, and contrast features of the rainforest before and after deforestation. It is very important that Mr. Nelson help his students understand that the graphic organizer is both a content organizer *and* a language support.

Across many of his units, Mr. Nelson uses the T-chart as a language support for comparing and contrasting. First, Mr. Nelson shows the class pictures of a rainforest before and after deforestation and asks students what similarities and differences they notice. After a few responses from students, Mr. Nelson tells students that he wants to focus on what language scientists would use when comparing and contrasting the rainforest. He shows the students the T-chart and reminds them that they have used the graphic organizer in the past as a content organizer but today they will be using it in a different way. He goes on to do a think aloud about how the class can use

different words/phrases when comparing and contrasting different concepts or ideas. He offers a variety of words or phrases that relate to similarities and differences (see examples below), and models where they fit best in the graphic organizer. He tells his students that these words and phrases can be used in a variety of ways but today they will focus on using these words to compare and contrast the rainforest before and after deforestation.

He then models how he would use the words and phrases with the rainforest pictures:

- “Before deforestation, rainforests have lots of plants and animals. But after deforestation, animals and plants lose their habitats.”
- “There are many differences between rainforests before and after deforestation. One big difference is...”
- “The land continues to provide income to local people and companies.”

## Compare/Contrast Graphic Organizer

COMPARE	CONTRAST
Both...	While/Whereas...
...is like/the same as/similar to because...	...is different because...
One similarity is...	One difference is...
...continues to...	However...
...and...	...but...

Once filled out as shown above, the T-chart serves as a support for Julia to practice forming sentences incorporating the content of the lesson. Mr. Nelson pairs Julia up with a partner to practice adding the content about rainforests from a word bank to the T-chart, making sure to use vocabulary identified in the language objective. It is important to note that the supports Mr. Nelson provides can be generalized to other topics and subject areas. The purpose of the

T-chart activity is to provide the students with language structures that can be used throughout their academic experience—not just in the rainforest unit. Through the use of a T-chart, Mr. Nelson provides his students with language structures centered around comparison and contrast—structures used often throughout different academic subject areas. This is the value of using such a support.

For Marco, Mr. Nelson uses the three-part *preview-view-review* strategy (Freeman & Freeman, 2002) to purposefully draw on his home language as a scaffold for content learning. Since there is an important rainforest in Marco's birth country of Brazil, Mr. Nelson, Marco, and Marco's parents all look for resources (photographs, maps, videos, realia) presenting information about the rainforest in Brazil that can be used to preview and review the content together. Many of these materials may be in Portuguese.

First, Mr. Nelson encourages Marco to draw on his stronger language to *preview* features of the rainforest before and after deforestation on his own (before the lesson), perhaps using the resources gathered in Portuguese and conversations with his parents about the rainforest as scaffolding and support. Second, Marco *views* the content in English (during the lesson in Mr. Nelson's class). However, because Marco has activated and built some background knowledge about the rainforest through his first language at home, he is more likely to comprehend some of the big ideas of the lesson in English and pick up some new Science and Social Studies-related language. Third, Mr. Nelson encourages the school's ESL teacher, Ms. Krukowski, to *review* the content of the lesson with Marco (after the lesson) to deepen his understanding of the big ideas.

The preview-view-review strategy also allows Marco's parents, Ms. Krukowski, and maybe even other community members to be involved in and support Marco's education in ways that build on what they collectively know and can do, making the content relevant for Marco and reinforcing Mr. Nelson's instruction.



## Taking home language interactive support to the next level

Students' strengths in their home language can also be used to support their language development in English and in the home language. For example, Mr. Nelson knows that Julia speaks Spanish, Marco speaks Portuguese, and both of these languages are Latin-based. Mr. Nelson also knows that three other students in the class speak Spanish at home. Although Mr. Nelson only speaks English, he encourages Marco, Julia, and the three other Spanish-speakers to identify **cognates** in Spanish, English, and Portuguese (e.g., *destruction/destrucción*). Identifying cognates across languages is a powerful way for bilingual students to make connections between their two languages. Moreover, Mr. Nelson knows that academic English has a strong base in Latin, which means that students who speak Latin-based languages and are familiar with the content topic can learn to use cognates as a strong scaffold for academic vocabulary development in English. Mr. Nelson invites these bilingual students to create bilingual word walls and bilingual books that include key content vocabulary in two languages. Although Gujarati is not a Latin-based language and therefore shares fewer cognates with English than Spanish or Portuguese, Mr. Nelson invites Amitabh to add Gujarati words to the multilingual word wall. This practice is aligned with his school's 21st century learning goal to value and promote multilingualism as an important part of global learning.

**COGNATES:** Words in different languages that have the same origins, sound similar, and mean the same thing. However, be careful using these. False cognates can cause confusion!

Amitabh brings very different strengths to Mr. Nelson's class. Like Julia, Amitabh is a level 3 ELL according to the composite score. Unlike Julia, Amitabh's reading and writing levels are higher than his listening and speaking levels; Mr. Nelson refers to the



## WIDA Can Do Descriptors

LEVEL	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5
Speaking	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.
Writing	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.	1. Identify and use simple words and phrases to communicate basic needs. 2. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 3. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 4. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events. 5. Identify and use simple words and phrases to describe people, objects, and events.

WIDA Can Do Descriptors and sees that students with level 5 writing skills can be expected to successfully complete the writing assignment in English and predicts that Amitabh's work will show only occasional evidence of his status as a language learner. However, when it comes to speaking in English, Mr. Nelson knows that he needs to differentiate his instruction and assessment to include Amitabh and Marco who are both at beginning stages of oral language development in English.

Many of the strategies that are appropriate for Marco (using photographs, realia, video, preview-view-review) provide strong scaffolding and support for Amitabh's movement along the continuum of second language development in speaking. Mr. Nelson also draws on Amitabh's strengths in reading and writing in English to support Amitabh's development of the oral English he needs to participate in the field trip to the botanical garden, engage in classroom discussions, and contribute to the persuasive argument students will present to the town council. Mr. Nelson includes many opportunities for Marco and Amitabh to talk about the content they are learning at their instructional listening and speaking levels in English with the scaffolds and supports they need for success. Another important oral language development strategy involves Mr. Nelson's careful selection of partners and group members for activities, so that Marco and Amitabh can practice their skills and learn from their peers.

## Pulling it all together in flexible groupings

Mr. Nelson doesn't focus on what individual ELLs like Marco, Julia, and Amitabh can do with reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English and other languages in isolation. Instead, Mr. Nelson integrates the four domains in the activities he structures in class, and he groups students to purposefully draw on their strengths as individuals and in groups in mutually beneficial ways.

Sometimes, Mr. Nelson groups ELLs at similar levels of English language proficiency in one domain (e.g., speaking) together to focus instruction on a particular scaffold, support, or strategy that is intended to benefit this group. For example, in order to prepare Amitabh and Marco to participate in an oral presentation of a persuasive argument to the town council, Mr. Nelson may group Marco and Amitabh together to practice transition words they will need to orally compare and contrast in English (e.g., *On one hand.... On the other hand....*) or to make a persuasive summary statement (e.g., *This presentation clearly shows...*), and the ESL teacher, Ms. Krukowski, may support this language-focused work in a push-in/inclusion or pull-out capacity.

Other times, Mr. Nelson intentionally structures groups of students at different levels of English language proficiency so that they can draw on the strengths of their peers, including native English speakers. For example, Mr. Nelson might group Julia and Amitabh together so that they can use Amitabh's strong writing in English to support Julia's writing development. They can draw on Julia's strong oral language in English to support Amitabh's oral language development in English.

Mr. Nelson includes all of his students when he considers different grouping arrangements. For example, sometimes he groups Marco, Julia, and the other Spanish speakers during a vocabulary building lesson so they can explore cognates together and stimulate connections across languages that one student may not have noticed on his or her own. This kind of reciprocal teaching benefits students as they work together to learn content, develop social and academic language and literacy in English, and integrates students from diverse backgrounds into a strong community of learners.

## Evaluating achievement of language and content objectives

Mr. Nelson also grades his students on their performance relative to the differentiated objectives he wrote for them (see Part 1, May 2012). Teachers assess student performance by collecting evidence of what their students can do in the range of activities that they organize for the class and evaluate students' performance relative to their realistic content and language objectives. The performance-based evidence will take different forms depending on the nature of the activity and the content and language expectations for student performance (e.g., observation of students' oral language use, possibly audio or videotaped, assessed with checklists; samples of student writing assessed with rubrics). For example, Marco (currently level 1) demonstrates his achievement of the content objectives by correctly placing photographs of the rainforest before deforestation on the left side of a T-chart graphic organizer and photos of the rainforest after deforestation on the right side. He demonstrates his achievement of the language objectives by correctly labeling the photographs with target vocabulary words in English that he has copied down from this print-rich classroom environment, and by writing a few short, simple phrases (with errors) about the pictures that he heard orally and saw in writing quite a few times throughout the lesson. Even though Marco is at the early stages of English language development, he is clearly engaged in the class activities. Marco has achieved the content and language objectives of this lesson for a level 1 student and Mr. Nelson grades him accordingly.

For Julia, Mr. Nelson can evaluate her completion of the T-chart with visual support and the help of a word bank. To measure her growth in language, Mr. Thompson can look for the use of the language he modeled in the graphic organizer in her completed sentences. For example, he may evaluate her use of pre-taught sequential language and conjunctions to form simple compound sentences. He will not lower Julia's grade as a result of other grammatical or mechanical errors in her English, as he will only evaluate based on his particular language objectives related to this lesson.

Finally, Amitabh's writing can be expected to contain slight errors related to second language acquisition and slightly below grade-

level complexity. But if his representation of the content is accurate and all language expectations are met for his level of language proficiency, his grade should appropriately reflect that achievement.

## Strategies for Success

English language learners can reach the same high content-area standards as all students and as we have seen, they add tremendous richness to their classroom's learning environment with the unique strengths they bring with them to school. Teachers need to begin by identifying these individual and collective strengths, and they need to know how to differentiate content and language instruction and assessment for diverse learners in order to guide them to and along productive pathways. When all teachers—including elementary classroom and secondary content teachers, literacy and special education specialists, and ESL/bilingual educators—share responsibility for educating the ELLs in their classes, these learners can make great strides in simultaneously acquiring language and content knowledge.



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content standards into your lesson plans?  
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[www.wida.us](http://www.wida.us)

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Do you have ideas for what you'd like to see in a future WIDA Focus Bulletin? Do you have personal experiences you can share about the instruction and assessment of language learners? We hope to include many of your stories and suggestions in future issues of this bulletin. Please send an email to [help@wida.us](mailto:help@wida.us) and write "Focus Bulletin idea" in the subject line.

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## WIDA's Mission

WIDA supports academic language development and academic achievement for linguistically diverse students through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional development for educators.