



Hallmark 3 of Advanced Literacies Instruction: Building Written Language

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Hallmark 3:
Write to build
language and
knowledge

Why is this important?

Writing is an under-utilized strategy for supporting students' advanced literacy skills¹. However, it is a crucial platform for fostering emerging and developing academic language among students acquiring English at school and their peers². Writing alone is certainly less powerful than instruction that engages students in reading, writing and talking about a topic of study. In fact, a growing research base suggests that frequent opportunities to engage in text-based writing supported by talk are linked with stronger language and literacy skills overall for English Language Learners and Multilingual Learners.³

Student writing is also a highly informative tool for assessing language and concept mastery. When students can accurately use new vocabulary and language structures in their writing, we know they grasp the concept or the linguistic structure their writing represents. Keep in mind that students, especially ELLs/MLLs, are often first exposed to academic language when they read written text, so once they start to use academic language in their own writing, we know that their language development is advancing.



What are Advanced Literacies?

Advanced literacies refers to the skills and competencies that enable communication in increasingly diverse ways and promote the understanding and use of text for a variety of purposes.

¹Graham, S., & Hebert, M. (2011). Writing to Read: A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Writing and Writing Instruction on Reading. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(4), 710-744.

²Baker, Scott, Lesaux, Nonie, Jayanthi, Madhavi, Dimino, Joseph, Proctor, C. Patrick, Morris, Joan, Newman-Gonchar, Rebecca. (2014). Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School. IES Practice Guide. *NCEE* 2014-401.

³Reznitskaya, A., Kuo, L.-J., Clark, A.-M., Miller, B., Jadallah, M., Anderson, R. C., & Nguyen-Jaheil, K. (2009). Collaborative reasoning: A dialogic approach to group discussions. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39, 29-48.

What types of writing fuel content mastery?

Four types of writing activities have been linked with improved content knowledge and mastery⁴:

1. Extended writing
2. Summary writing
3. Note-taking to produce a research paper or presentation
4. Generating and answering questions

What does this instruction look like in linguistically-diverse classrooms?

Traditional Instructional Practices

Many writing assignments in today's schools are actually just brief writing "exercises" — on-demand writing (putting pencil to paper in a hurry), often in response to a prompt, and most often drawing on personal experience and opinion (sometimes referred to as "journal responses" or "free writes"). Many times, these exercises don't involve the multiple steps — planning and process — involved in writing and they are not clearly connected to the unit's topic. They are warm-up activities and/or excellent for transitioning between learning tasks, but we can't consider them a part of writing instruction that will build language and knowledge.

21st-Century Instructional Practices

For writing to promote students' language and cognitive skills, students need a structured, content-based approach to all writing assignments and tasks, e.g. writing prompts, text questions, or narratives. Students need to have studied the material to be processed and written about. They also need supports and scaffolds to plan, discuss, and organize their ideas and develop an argument; incorporate and connect their words and sentences; and/or move from notes to a flowing paragraph.

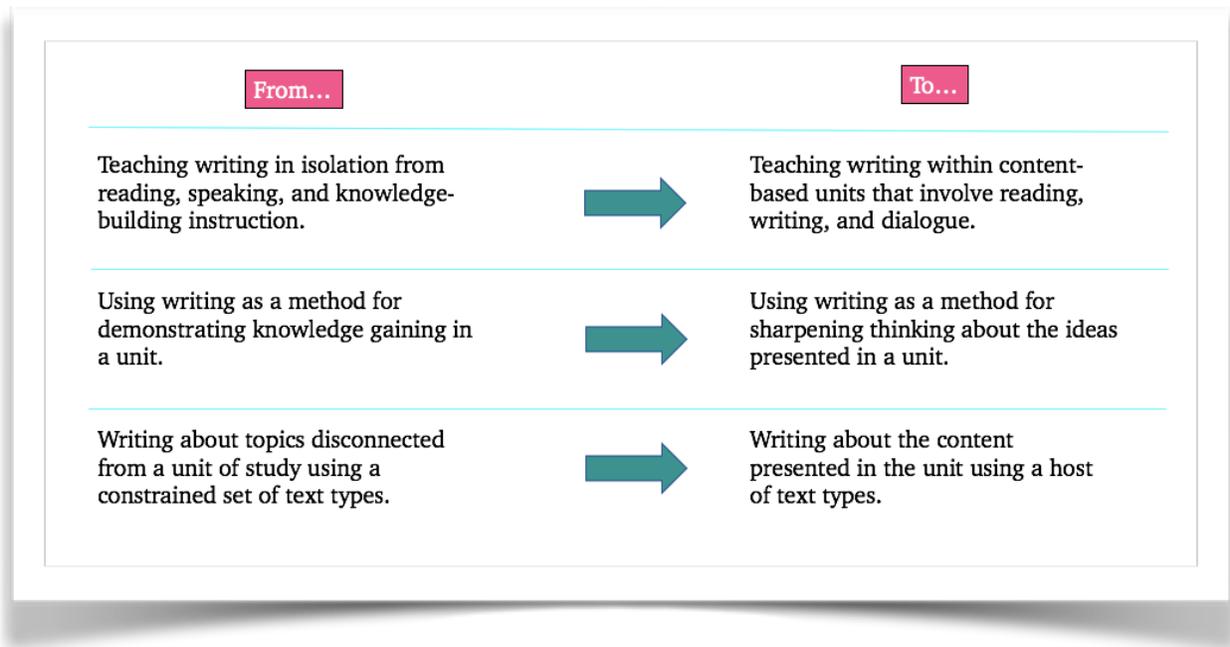
Building on Linguistically-Diverse Students' Language and Cultural Resources

For linguistically-diverse students, it is crucial to support academic writing by teaching the specific language that students need to communicate complex ideas.

Quick Tip: Teach words that serve as signposts ('First,' 'Second,' and 'Third') and link ideas ('However' and 'Therefore'). These words often serve similar functions as words that students likely know in a home language ('and,' 'but,' 'so'). Making these links between home and additional language(s) supports students to more readily master the functions of a new language.

⁴Graham, S., & Hebert, M. (2011). Writing to Read: A Meta-Analysis of the Impact of Writing and Writing Instruction on Reading. *Harvard Educational Review*, 81(4), 710-744.

Shifting How We Think About Writing Instruction



Indicators in Curriculum:

- Lesson incorporates the need for student writing that is related to the text.
- The writing lessons and lesson components require that students use the unit's vocabulary words and concepts, and other academic language.
- Writing routines (e.g., multi-step process, formats for responding to text) and tools (e.g., graphic organizers) are taught and used consistently and predictably throughout each unit, providing students with the time and opportunity to develop mastery of these learning processes.
- Students produce an extended writing piece as part of every unit to demonstrate their grasp of content and language (e.g., op-ed, essay, research report).

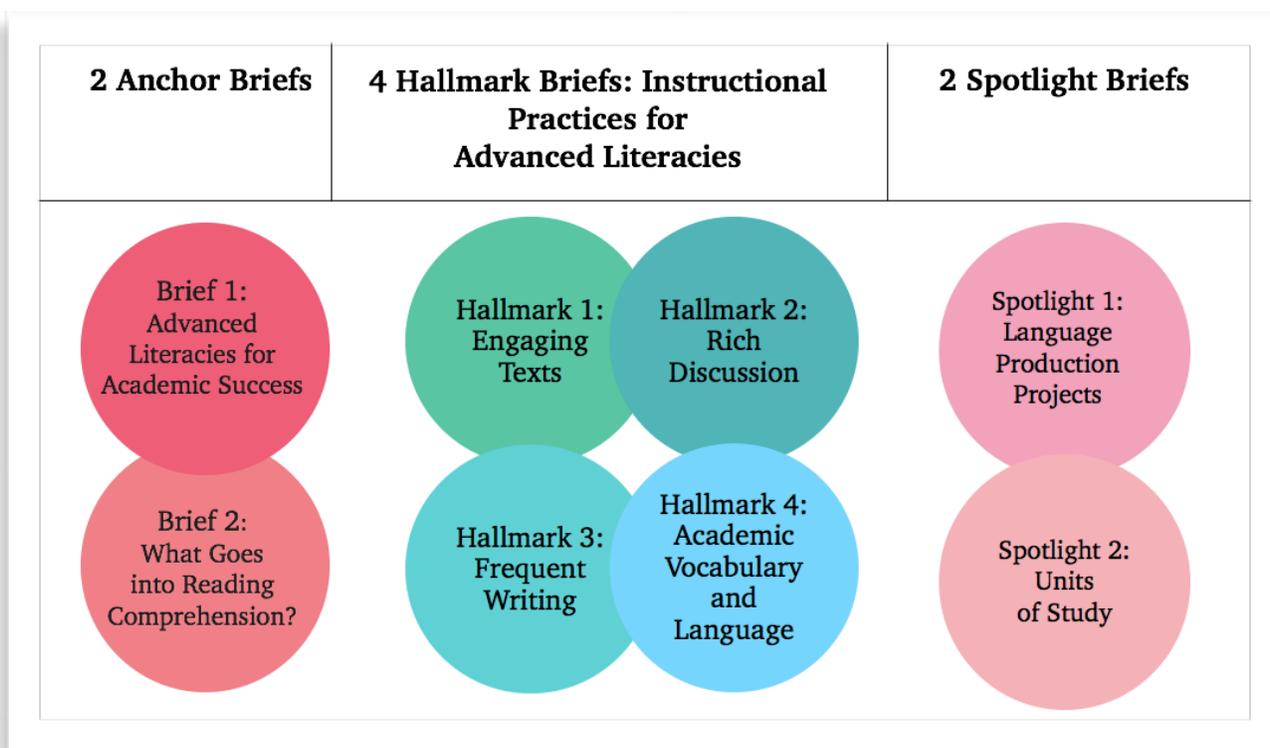
Indicators in Instruction:

- Instructor communicates the importance of using target words when writing.
- Instructor acknowledges the challenges associated with learning new language and conveys an attitude that values experimenting with language by *praising students' attempts* at using academic language when writing (i.e., an expectation that students will *not* likely use words and structures correctly or precisely at first).
- Instructor builds in writing routines/supports if these are not already an integral part of the curriculum.

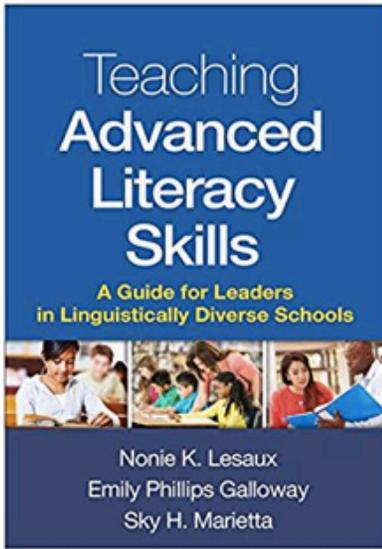
- ☑ Students are aware of the classroom’s writing routines, and demonstrate comfort with them.
- ☑ Writing is used as a method for consolidating thinking before and after reading (e.g., summarize or responding by sharing his or her opinion).
- ☑ Students are encouraged to use peers and texts as *language resources* when writing (e.g., to use language structures and words found in mentor texts or to adopt language that peers have used successfully in their own texts or speech).
- ☑ Students are asked to make use of previously taught words, language structures, and strategies for academic language learning when writing.

A Map of this Brief Series

This is Hallmark 3 in a series of briefs designed to aid New York State educators in implementing the revised standards, particularly in settings serving linguistically diverse learners. This series includes:

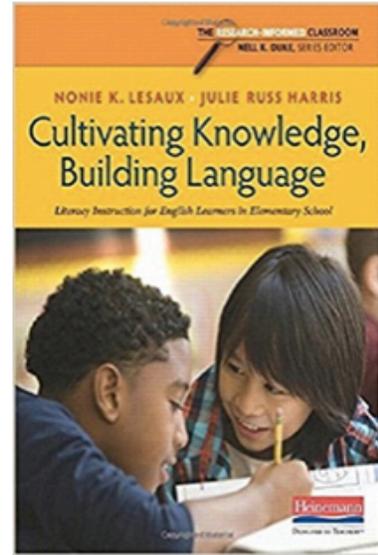


For more on this, see...



The **Lead for Literacy** initiative is a series of one-page memos that revisits assumptions that guide current policies and practices, outlines common pitfalls, and presents feasible solutions to pressing issues.

Access these briefs at <https://langlit.gse.harvard.edu/lead-for-literacy>



Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages:

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