Guidance for Teaching Literacy in Multilingual Settings

Skills Progressions: Writing

Transitional Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve



California Department of Education

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Using the Multilingual Skills Progression Documents

Purpose and Intent

California's Literacy Roadmap shapes the statewide approach to literacy and biliteracy, interlacing evidence-based and research-aligned practices that attend to the cultural and linguistic diversity of students across our state. This **Guidance for Teaching Literacy in Multilingual Settings** is offered in parallel to literacy guidance available for English-medium classrooms, adding both vivid distinction and subtle yet critical nuance to biliteracy instruction in multilingual programs.

Informed by research, practitioners, and subject matter experts, this guidance is a companion resource for transitional kindergarten through grade twelve (TK–12) dual language educators, including bilingual general and special education teachers, paraprofessionals, literacy coaches, and dual language education program leaders, to support the planning and delivery of effective biliteracy instruction and improve literacy outcomes for all students. While robust, this installment is merely a jumping-off point from earlier guidance, opening the door to further elaboration on dual language program implementation, including multilingual assessment, dual language education leadership, and more.

Rather than serving as a scope and sequence, curriculum map, or pacing guide, this resource intends to honor and reflect rich literacy instruction across many languages and multilingual education program models (e.g., dual language immersion, developmental bilingual, heritage language). Offering practical guidelines for making curricular and instructional decisions, the resource embraces the diversity of instructional approaches, time allocations, and culturally responsive practices needed to support the unique features of each language. Specifically, the skills progressions documents include augmentations for 15 different languages (each published separately) to specialize instruction.

Using This Guidance

The Guidance for Teaching Literacy in Multilingual Settings is designed for bilingual practitioners statewide. Educators should use this guidance alongside the California Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (CA CCSS ELA/Literacy), the California English Language Development Standards (CA ELD Standards), the California World Languages Standards (WL Standards), and the Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations (PTKLF) as indicated by grade span. All of these, together with related biliteracy resources, guide the following:

- Individual educators as they set priorities and refine their instructional practices.
- Team discussions on instructional materials and approaches, assessment results in both program languages, and acceleration, remediation, and needed interventions.
- Schoolwide and individual plans for professional learning, including coaching.
- Development of school and district biliteracy plans, including a Multi-Tiered System of Support, analysis of the implementation of instruction across all literacy areas, and selection of curricula and assessment instruments.

This guidance is to be used in tandem with high-quality, authentic biliteracy instructional materials; deep knowledge of language, biliteracy development, and culturally affirming approaches; an understanding of students' language and lived experiences; and other dual language and biliteracy instructional resources as a starting point for biliteracy instructional decision-making.

Appendix A of the Guidance for Teaching Literacy in Multilingual Settings contains **guiding questions** designed to support teaching teams as they engage in instructional planning in multilingual programs, with the goal of maximizing instructional impact in both languages while avoiding redundancy.

By integrating oral language development, foundational literacy skills, reading comprehension and writing instruction, and cross-linguistic pedagogy, teachers empower students to succeed academically while honoring their linguistic and cultural assets. In this way, multilingual literacy instruction not only supports academic achievement but also advances equity and prepares students for participation in an increasingly interconnected world (García and Kleyn 2016; California Department of Education 2020).

Organization of This Guidance

The centerpiece of this guidance is a series of four skills progressions documents. Each document is arranged by grade spans to assist educators in identifying a general entry point to their biliteracy instructional planning. Students bring a range of existing language and literacy experiences in English and the partner language, and their developmental characteristics and contexts shape their biliteracy learning trajectories. As a result, students in a given year will have different entry points, and it is up to educators to understand precisely each student's strengths and needs with respect to literacy skills in the languages of instruction.

The skills progressions are organized into the following **Core Areas of Literacy in Multilingual Programs**:

- Oral Language and Academic Discourse
- Foundational Literacy Skills
- Reading
- Writing

In addition to addressing the core areas of literacy, the progressions documents also feature:

- **Grade Spans:** Understanding that students develop literacy in two languages at different rates, the progressions are arranged by grade spans to provide practitioners a “mile marker” to determine where a student might enter the progressions. This also allows practitioners to look across, beyond, or before the span associated with particular grade levels for various skills to plan differentiation. Grade spans represented are TK–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12.
- **What Students Do:** Skill progression descriptions aligned to the standards indicate how students develop biliteracy and academic skills over time.
- **Evidence-Based Strategies:** Examples of evidence-based instructional strategies are provided that support multilingual learners across grade spans, levels of language and literacy development, and program models.
- **Standards:** Standards are provided to highlight anticipated learning outcomes and to assist time-constrained bilingual teachers who often develop much of their own curricula and must identify literacy learning milestones. Additionally, the skills progression documents that support Spanish and English instruction include two additional resources: the California Common Core en Español and the California Spanish Language Development Standards (CA SLD Standards).
- **Language Considerations:** Strategies and linguistic features are provided to assist educators in understanding and teaching the languages most prominently represented in dual language education programs in California, including Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, Hebrew, Russian, Ukrainian, Mixtec, Hmong, Khmer, Portuguese, and Filipino. Skills progression documents in the various languages are available via the California Department of Education Literacy Roadmap web page.

Each skills progression document focuses on one language in the Language Considerations column.

The Literacy Roadmap web page includes these Skills Progression documents, the Illustrative Multilingual Literacy Scenarios, study guides, a glossary, and the research and references that support the guidance. These can be used with adopted curricula to support biliteracy instruction.

Skills Progressions: Writing

Writing is a tool through which learning takes place and a tool to express learning. It is also an opportunity for early approximation (intentional, imperfect attempts at a new skill or practice), and later, refined application of other skills, from culturally responsive communication and meaning-making to more discrete skills like spelling and grammar. In dual language programs, writing capacity is developed equally and fully in both languages across the years of the program (i.e., over the years spent in a transitional kindergarten [TK] through sixth-grade dual language program at a school site).

In the earliest dual language education experience, students are encountering and learning from print-rich environments in two languages, developing their awareness of how print functions to convey meaning. Young students make initial attempts to generate various forms of writing, including drawing and letter-like symbols. Through instruction and support, they map awareness of sounds and symbols to construct their own messages, leveraging their understanding of the relationship between decoding and encoding. With developmentally appropriate teaching, they learn to use writing as a tool for expression that increases in complexity and duration over time.

Older students are taught to transfer writing skills and expected to apply them in both program languages. Students are provided ample and meaningful opportunities to compose written responses and generate original texts in a variety of text types (literary, informational, opinion/argument) in both brief and longer formats (writing of words, sentences, paragraphs, essays, and stories) based on developmental goals and program milestones. This can be achieved in dual language programs through a combination of modeling and teaching writing tasks so that students may move from guided to independent writing in both languages, which includes shorter form writing and sustained writing experiences.

It can be expected, dependent upon the program model and language allocation at each grade level, that a writer's development in one language (i.e., the partner language) may initially outpace writing development of English in the early grades. Nonetheless, it is critical to acknowledge that various skills developed as students learn to write in one language are transferable to writing capacity in English, such as some sentence punctuation and paragraph structure between Spanish and English. This reality should not preclude in any way the responsibility for explicit instruction and students actively practicing writing in each language and across the content areas.

Students in multilingual programs transition from writing in the partner language into writing more fully in English. As one example, a teacher might expect that students apply translanguaging strategically: While drafting a writing assignment, a student has an idea, and the teacher encourages them to express the idea in Vietnamese (their home language) when they do not yet know the English vocabulary word. This is how students are able to fully utilize their language repertoire in the context of their learning while concurrently developing literacy in two languages. As writers develop capacities in both languages, teachers can note evidence of other cross-linguistic relationships, such as directionality, application of grammatical features, use of syntax and sentence structure, cohesive devices, figurative language, etc., using student writing as an opportunity for formative assessment to inform where instruction is needed: confirming positive transfer and teaching to misconceptions where transfer may be overgeneralized or misapplied between the two languages of instruction, noting and leveraging student approximation during instruction and practice.

Abbreviations for Standards

- **CA ELD**: California English Language Development Standards
- **CCSS ELA**: California Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts
- **PTKLF**: California Preschool/Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations
- **WL**: World Languages Standards
- **CCSS AL en español**: Common Core State Standards Artes de lenguaje en español
- **CA SLD**: California Spanish Language Development Standards

Grades TK–2



What Students Do

- Students begin by drawing, dictating, or writing thoughts and ideas to writing opinion, informative or explanatory, and narrative texts on a book, topic, or event they are writing about that states the topic. Then students progress to using reasoning, supplying facts, sequencing details with temporal words that link words to connect opinions and reasons, using facts to develop points, recounting events with details that use temporal words signaling order, and providing closure statements.
- Students progress from using adult support to express thoughts, words, and ideas in writing, to responding to questions and suggestions, and to revising and editing writing with increased independence, while using a variety of digital tools to add details that produce and strengthen writing, including collaboration with peers.
- Students progress from demonstrating interest in conveying extended thoughts and ideas in writing with adult support to participating in shared research and writing projects, and then to independently recalling information and gathering resources to answer questions.
- Students begin by using scribbles and recognizable letters or characters, with adult support, to represent sounds, words, ideas, thoughts, and names, and progress to writing routinely over short and extended time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Related Standards

CCSS ELA: RF.K–2.1–6; L.K–2.1–6

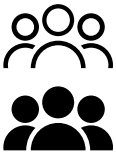
PTKLF: FLS.TK–2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5

CA ELD: Part III Using Foundational Literacy Skills

WL: Comparisons

CCSS AL en español: LF. K–2.1–3; L.K.2e; L.1.2f; L.2.2g

CA SLD: Parte III: Destrezas Fundamentales de Lectura [Alfabetización]



Evidence-Based Practices

- Affirm and build upon emerging biliteracy skills, recognizing scribbles, invented spelling, approximations, and early writing attempts as important stages in developing proficiency across languages.

- Model drawing, dictating, and writing about shared experiences in both program languages to demonstrate how ideas can be communicated in different ways.
- Guide drawing/writing responses to shared texts or cultural experiences.
- Use observe–talk–write cycles with cultural artifacts.
- Design instructional cycles moving from oral discussion to writing in both languages.
- Use bilingual vocabulary charts to teach for transfer between program languages.
- Provide bilingual word walls, anchor charts, sentence frames, and visual supports that help students independently apply vocabulary and language structures in writing.
- Support drawing/writing projects that highlight cultural identity.
- Prompt students to explain their opinions using simple reasons with sentence frames and visual supports.
- Create authentic opportunities for students to write for bilingual audiences, such as family letters, classroom books, multilingual displays, informational posters, and community projects that value both languages.
- Provide oral language rehearsal opportunities before writing, allowing students to discuss ideas with partners in the language of instruction.
- Facilitate cross-linguistic noticing by helping students compare how ideas, sentence structures, or sequencing words are expressed across languages.
- Encourage students to access their full linguistic repertoire to write about authentic topics. Encourage pair/group work where students with different linguistic repertoires can practice, exchange, and learn from peers.
- Guide students in making cross-linguistic connections by noticing similarities and differences in sounds, letters, characters, words, and sentence structures across languages.



Spanish Language Considerations

- Teach capitalization differences (Spanish does not capitalize months, days, languages, nationalities, cardinal points, all words in a title, etc.).
- Use the practice *"dictado" t*o support student application of sounds and symbols while developing writing fluency.
- Highlight use of accent marks, Spanish letters (ñ), digraphs (ll, ch, rr, gu, qu), muted h, and inverted punctuation (¿, ¡).
- Validating regional and heritage varieties of Spanish expands students' expressive range.
- Provide structured and flexible opportunities for moving fluidly between Spanish and English when it serves emphasis, identity, humor, precision, and cultural nuance.
- Highlight formal vs. informal register in writing (letters: *estimado señor* vs. *querido amigo*).

Grades 3–5



What Students Do

- Students move from writing pieces with a clear topic or opinion and basic structure to producing organized writing that elaborates ideas and relevant facts, details, examples, and descriptive elements across three major genres—opinion, informative/explanatory, and narrative—by introducing topics clearly, grouping related ideas, using linking and transitional language to connect ideas, and providing coherent conclusions, while strengthening revision, research, and use of evidence.
- Students progress from developing and strengthening writing with guidance through planning, revising, and editing to using the writing process, including revising and rewriting, to improve writing aligned to task, purpose, and

Related Standards

CCSS ELA: RL/RI.3–5.1–10

CA ELD: Interpretive PI.3–5.5–7; Structuring Cohesive Texts PII.3–5.1–2

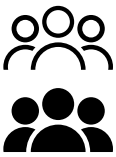
WL: Interpretive Communication, Connections

CSSS AL en Español: LL.3–5.1–7, 9, 10; LI.3–5.1–10; LF.3-5.4

CA SLD: Interpretativo PI.3–5.5–7; Estructurar Textos Cohesivos PII.3–5.1–2

audience, using technology to produce, publish, and collaborate while demonstrating increasing proficiency in composing longer pieces of writing.

- Students engage in inquiry cycles to conduct research, progressing from short research projects to build knowledge about a topic to investigating multiple aspects of a topic using information from print and digital sources, and to recalling, gathering, and organizing relevant information; taking notes; paraphrasing and summarizing; drawing evidence from texts to support analysis, reflection, and research; and comparing how explanations are structured across languages.
- Students write routinely over both extended and shorter time frames across content areas for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences, demonstrating stamina and flexibility.



Evidence-Based Practices

- Continue teaching cognate/false cognate strategies. Use cognates and glossaries to develop comprehension and vocabulary.
- Select texts from diverse cultural contexts.
- Use story maps and graphic organizers in one or both languages to support retelling, asking and answering questions, and quoting evidence in text.
- Model summarizing and practice orally using key details in both languages.
- Facilitate bilingual discussions about how details reflect cultural norms.
- Provide **dual-language texts** focusing on a theme or subject to deepen inquiry.
- Provide opportunities to read and discuss complex texts in both languages around shared topics and themes.
- Encourage students to transfer comprehension strategies developed in one language to reading in the other.
- Facilitate discussion of how language and culture influence themes, perspectives, and character development.
- Encourage students to draw on knowledge gained in one language to deepen understanding of texts in the other.
- Model how to apply morphological and vocabulary knowledge while reading, discussing, and writing in both languages.



Spanish Language Considerations

- Introduce basic literature genres (adventure, fantasy, romance, mystery ...) authentic to Spanish.
- Apply written features unique to Spanish such as the use of the guión (<< >>) for dialogue in contrast to the use of quotation marks in English.
- Scaffold syntax differences in writing (e.g., adjective placement: *casa blanca* vs. *white house*).
- Make explicit reference to the use of strong verbs expressing full meaning in Spanish (entrar) vs verb + particle (phrasal verbs = *go in*) in English to reinforce meaning (e.g., sacar = to take out; subir = to go up; bajar = to go down).

Grades 6–8



What Students Do

- Students move from introducing clear claims, topics, or narratives with basic organization and relevant details to developing cohesive arguments, informative texts, and narratives that organize ideas logically, support claims with credible evidence, address alternate perspectives, use precise and domainspecific language and effective techniques, and maintain a formal style appropriate to task, purpose, and audience, while engaging with multilingual sources and adapting language and genre expectations for different audiences and genres.
- Students progress to using the writing process more strategically to improve clarity and effectiveness, including revising, rewriting, and trying new approaches based on purpose and audience, and to producing clear and coherent writing aligned to task, purpose, and audience, using technology to produce, publish, collaborate, integrate, and cite sources, and present relationships among ideas.

Related Standards

CCSS: W.6–8.1–10

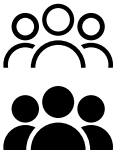
CA ELD: Productive PI.6–8.2,4,7–8,10–12; Structuring Cohesive Texts PII.6–8.1–2

WL: Presentational Communication, Comparisons

CSSS AL en español: E.6–8.1–5, 7–10

CA SLD: Productivo PI.6–8.2, 4, 7–8, 10–12; Estructurar Textos Cohesivos PII.6–8.1–2

- Students progress from conducting research to answering questions using multiple sources, including from literary and informational texts, to generating and refining questions that guide inquiry, and to gathering, evaluating, and organizing information from print and digital sources using effective search strategies, paraphrasing and summarizing ideas, and integrating and citing evidence accurately to support analysis, reflection, and research, while integrating multilingual sources and adapting paraphrasing and quoting conventions across languages.
- Students continue to consistently write over short and extended time frames for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences, demonstrating increasing stamina, independence, and flexibility in applying writing skills across contexts.



Evidence-Based Practices

- Model how to develop claims and explanations using evidence from texts in both program languages, highlighting how evidence strengthens arguments.
- Facilitate analysis of bilingual mentor texts to examine how authors organize arguments, informational texts, and narratives for different audiences and purposes.
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss, plan, and refine ideas orally before writing, using the language of instruction while strategically drawing on cross-linguistic knowledge.
- Teach students to use precise academic and domain-specific vocabulary, comparing language choices and terminology across languages when appropriate.
- Facilitate cross-linguistic analysis of transition words, cohesion devices, and organizational patterns to support clear and coherent writing. Guide research projects that compare cultural perspectives on the same theme.
- Provide structured peer review protocols that focus on content, evidence, organization, and language use rather than simple editing.
- Provide authentic opportunities for students to write for bilingual and multilingual audiences, such as editorials, research reports, digital publications, presentations, and community advocacy projects.

Spanish Language Considerations

- Expand literature genres and compare genre expectations in Spanish essays vs. English.
- Provide strategic translanguaging opportunities and structures to invite students to draft their writing in the language that feels most natural, then revise for clarity across languages. Model sentences that blend languages strategically, not randomly. Highlight how bilingual authors use translanguaging to build voice, identity, and meaning.

Grades 9–12

What Students Do

- Students progress from constructing arguments that support claims about topics and texts by clearly establishing relationships among claims, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence to developing more sophisticated arguments that advance knowledgeable and significant claims, establish more logical and strategic relationships among ideas, and use cohesive language and varied sentence structures to link sections of text, maintain discipline-appropriate tone responsive to the audience, and provide a conclusion that supports and strengthens the argument through strategic use of rhetorical devices.
- Students progress from writing informative/explanatory texts. Students will progress from writing informative/explanatory texts that introduce and organize complex ideas to make clear connections and distinctions, using relevant and sufficient evidence, transitions, and precise language to explain a topic, to developing more cohesive and unified texts that build ideas logically, select the most significant and relevant information, and use increasingly sophisticated language and techniques to clarify complex relationships and articulate the significance of the topic.

Related Standards

CCSS: W.9–12.1–10

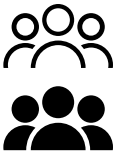
CA ELD: Productive PI.9–12.2,4,7–8,10–12; Structuring Cohesive Texts PII.9–12.1–2

WL: Interpretive Communication, Communities

CSSS AL en español: E.9–12.1–10

CA SLD: Productivo PI.9–12.2, 4, 7–8, 10–12; Estructurar Textos Cohesivos PII.9–12.1–2

- Students progress from writing narratives that develop real or imagined experiences using clear sequences, effective techniques, and well-chosen details to create coherence, to developing more sophisticated narratives that build unified and purposeful event sequences, deepen the development of experiences and characters through strategic use of narrative techniques, and use precise language and structure to create tone and impact.
- Students progress from conducting short as well as more sustained research to answer questions or solve problems by gathering, synthesizing, and integrating information from multiple sources, including literary and informational texts, to conducting more strategic research that refines inquiry, evaluates the strengths and limitations of sources in relation to task, purpose, and audience, and selectively integrates and draws evidence from texts to support analysis, reflection, and research while maintaining coherence, depth, and independence.



Evidence-Based Practices

- Model how to develop sophisticated claims and counterclaims using evidence from multilingual sources, demonstrating how evidence selection strengthens an argument.
- Examine the nature of translation as a tool of mediation and how literal translation eliminates the intentionality, positionality, and identity of the authors creating the written text.
- Encourage students to use cross-linguistic analysis to refine vocabulary, tone, and precision, selecting language that best fits purpose, audience, and discipline.
- Engage students in sustained inquiry projects that require generating questions, refining research plans, and integrating information from multilingual sources.
- Provide publication opportunities written within a single linguistic repertoire (across languages).
- Provide authentic opportunities for students to write for bilingual, multilingual, and public audiences, such as research papers, policy briefs, editorials, literary analyses, community advocacy projects, and digital publications.

- Teach students to use cohesive devices, transitions, and varied sentence structures strategically, comparing how cohesion is achieved across languages. Highlight differences in style, tone, and audience expectations across languages.
- Guide students in revising their own speaking and writing by selecting precise vocabulary and language structures that achieve a specific tone and purpose in each language.



Spanish Language Considerations

- Support use of the subjunctive mood in academic writing (e.g., *Es necesario que estudien* ...).