

The GO TO Strategies: Teaching Tools for Outstanding Educators

by [Linda New Levine](#), [Laura Lukens](#), and [Betty Ansin Smallwood](#)

What is an outstanding educator? In today's schools, educators are outstanding when they are capable of using all the tools they have available to reach and teach all of the learners in their classrooms all of the time. It is rare to find a catalog of tools that works equally well with language learners, language delayed learners, ESL learners, EFL learners, children, adults, and teacher educators. [*The GO TO Strategies: Scaffolding Options for Teachers of English Language Learners K-12*](#) is a compendium of tools for doing just that.

The 78 research-based strategies were compiled as a result of a National Professional Development Grant for general education teachers of English language learners (ELLs) in the North Kansas City Schools. Teachers in the project were exposed to the strategies during their coursework. They wanted to incorporate these strategies into their own classroom teaching and asked that all of the strategies be collected for their use.

Since that time, *The GO TO Strategies* have been available free on the Internet. They have been used in classrooms across the United States with a variety of students, used in foreign countries for EFL instruction, and taught in teacher education courses.

Because the strategies are generalized teaching techniques, they adapt to many different types of content and a wide variety of learners. Effective teachers can incorporate these strategies into specific learning situations that match the needs of their learners.

The strategies have been chosen to reflect five research-based principles of effective instruction for ELLs:

1. Focus on academic language, literacy, and vocabulary
2. Link background knowledge and culture to learning
3. Increase comprehensible input and language output
4. Promote classroom interaction
5. Stimulate higher order thinking and the use of learning strategies (Levine, Smallwood, & Hayes, 2012)

Classroom teachers with little experience in teaching ELLs and ESL teachers who are eager to try new strategies both find *The GO TO Strategies* helpful in solving problems related to instruction. Does the classroom lack unity? There are community-building strategies to help resolve that issue. Do the students require more aural-oral practice around content learning? Do students lag in the development of reading and writing skills? Have students not yet learned the study skills that can make learning more efficient? Do students need routines and structures for explicit vocabulary instruction? *The GO TO Strategies* contain helpful structures that can be adapted to any grade level, proficiency level, or content learning topic.

Differentiating Instruction With *The GO TO Strategies Matrix*

Today's ESL and EFL classrooms present educators with the unique challenge of scaffolding instruction for learners at various levels of language proficiency. *The GO TO Strategies Matrix* (PDF) is a useful tool for differentiating instruction based on students' levels of language proficiency. The Matrix allows educators to select strategies appropriate for learners at different proficiency levels within each of the four domains of language.

Using *The GO TO Strategies* for Planning Scaffolded Lessons

The GO TO Strategies resource handbook is divided into five user-friendly sections. The organization and formatting of the handbook was designed to allow teachers to select and implement the strategies with ease:

1. **The Overview:** Describes the rationale for the document and how the handbook is organized.
2. **Teaching and Learning Guided by the Five Principles of Instruction for English Language Learners:** Briefly defines the Five Principles and the research base for them, including five charts that list strategies that support the implementation of each principle in the classroom;
3. ***The GO TO Strategies Matrix*:** Includes a listing of strategies that scaffold instruction for learners in each domain based on proficiency level.
4. **The Inventory of *The GO TO Strategies*:** Includes a table of contents listing each strategy—labeled by language proficiency, teaching/learning purpose, and classroom grouping configuration—according to seven key teaching or learning purposes:
 - Community Building Strategies
 - Interactive Strategies
 - Teaching Strategies
 - Student Learning Strategies
 - Vocabulary Teaching Strategies
 - Reading Strategies
 - Writing Strategies
5. **The Glossary:** Presents the strategies (with expanded explanations, modification options, and visual examples) in alphabetical order for quick reference.

The GO TO Strategies scaffold academic language input to learners. This scaffolding is necessary for ELLs but it is also beneficial to many learners who have not yet acquired the academic school talk required for achievement in reading, writing, and testing. The strategies are applicable to all phases of a classroom lesson, thereby scaffolding language from the beginning of the lesson to the end. The following lesson plan framework is an example of how each stage of a lesson can be scaffolded. Appropriate strategies are mentioned for each phase of teaching and learning. Complete descriptions of the strategies can be found in *The GO TO Strategies* Inventory or Glossary sections. The Table of Contents in the Inventory section is hyperlinked for easier use.

Starting Instruction: Exploration Phase

- The teacher activates prior knowledge, learning, or understanding
 - Stir the Class (p. 37)
 - Roving Charts (p. 36)
 - K-W-L Charts (p. 40)
- Students engage in concrete exploration or observation
 - Graphic Organizers (p. 40)
 - Four Corners (p. 31)
- Students begin prereading activities
 - Anticipation Guides (p. 52)
 - Language Experience Approach (p. 56)
 - Teach the Text Backwards (p. 59)

Building Instruction: Concept Development

- The teacher directly teaches academic and technical vocabulary
 - Closed Sort Tasks (p. 48)
 - Cognates (p. 48)
 - Key Sentence Frames (p. 49)
- The students interact orally with other learners to develop concepts
 - 10-2 (p. 31)
 - Numbered Heads Together (p. 35)
 - Round the Clock Learning Partners (p. 36)
- The students engage in close reading
 - Guided Reading (p. 54)
 - Directed Reading/Thinking Activity (p. 54)
 - Reciprocal Teaching (p. 58)
- The students assemble or organize data
 - Concept/Idea Maps (p. 46)
 - Structured Note-Taking (p. 47)
 - T Charts (p. 47)

Building Instruction: Application of Learning

- The students continue to work concretely using new vocabulary
 - Dialogue Journals (p. 61)
 - Reader's Theatre (p. 42)
- The students use concepts in a new or more complex way
 - Text to Graphics and Back Again (p. 64)
 - Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (p. 56)
 - Jigsaw Reading (p. 55)
- The students report and/or write
 - Content Learning Logs (p. 61)

- Collaborative Dialogues (p. 39)
- Report Frames/Outlines (p. 63)

Concluding Instruction: Assessment

- Rubrics (p. 42)
- Comprehension Checking (p. 39)
- Snowball (p. 37)

Creating Outstanding Educators

The GO TO Strategies have been used in professional development around the world to create outstanding educators of ESL and EFL students. Program supervisors have recognized the versatility and applicability of these strategies in many different settings, and for solving a variety of problems related to the education of ELLs. Through preservice teacher workshops, tutoring programs, intensive year-long professional developments, and the like, *The GO TO Strategies* have addressed the needs of learners ranging from students in urban public schools to students in low incidence districts, from elementary refugee students in Missouri to EFL students in China and Bahrain.

Although receiving professional development on *The GO TO Strategies* enables teachers to return to their classrooms the next day and begin using the strategies, teachers can also work alone or in teams to infuse the principles and strategies into their teaching. Here are some practical ideas:

- Teams of English language and classroom or content teachers meet weekly to conduct a self-study group on *The GO TO Strategies* resource handbook.
- Teachers try out selected strategies in their classrooms (based on the strategy categories or the stages of the lesson plan format) and meet to debrief afterward in pairs, then report outcomes to the entire team. Pairs could ask and answer such questions as:
 - What strategy(ies) did I try?
 - How did it go?
 - What could I do differently next time?
- Pairs of teachers could do peer observations of each other and debrief together. Teachers could create a simple observational checklist based on the strategies or the lesson plan format to gauge the effectiveness of implementation.
- English language teachers could take the lead in providing professional development in their buildings based on the strategies. For example, during weekly staff meetings, English language teachers could present one strategy and explain why it is useful for the ELLs in general education classrooms.

These strategies have proven to be a valuable tool for educators in a variety of settings. How can you use *The GO TO Strategies* to be more outstanding in your teaching?

Reference

Levine, L. N., Smallwood, B. A., & Haynes, E. F. (2012). *Listening and speaking: Oral language and vocabulary development for English language learners*. In B. A. Smallwood (Series Ed.), *Hot topics in ELL education*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

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The GO TO Strategies Matrix: Scaffolding Options for Teachers of English Language Learners, K-12

	Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Emerging	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use physical gestures to accompany oral directives. Modify *Teacher Talk. Label visuals and objects with target vocabulary. Introduce Cognates to aid comprehension. Ask for Signal Responses to check comprehension. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give two step Contextualized directions. Restate/rephrase and use *Patterned Oral Language routines. Model Academic Language and vocabulary. Ask for Total Physical Responses from students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide graphics or objects to sequence steps in a process. Check Comprehension of all students frequently. Use *Wait Time. Provide Anticipation Guides for previewing content reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare/contrast relationships from auditory information using a Venn Diagram. Require students to restate and rephrase from auditory input as in *Paraphrase Passport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline lectures on the SmartBoard. Use *Video Observation Guides. Confirm students' prior knowledge of content topics. Extend content vocabulary with multiple examples and non-examples.
Speaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide wall charts with illustrated academic vocabulary. Ask simple WH (who, what, when, where), yes-no or either-or questions. Elicit *Choral Responses. Encourage participation in group chants, poems, and songs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use 10-2 structures. Assign roles in group work. Use Clock Buddies. Use Numbered Heads Together. Use *Think-Pair-Share-Squared. Develop Key Sentence Frames for pair interactions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide Graphic Organizers or notes to scaffold oral retelling. Prompt for academic language output. Use Think-Pair-Share. Repeat and Expand student responses in a *Collaborative Dialogue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require full sentence responses by asking open ended questions. Use Varied Presentation Formats such as role plays. * Scaffold oral reports with note cards and provide time for prior practice. Use Reader's Theatre to scaffold oral language growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Structure debates requiring various points of view with graphic organizers and/or outlines. Require the use of academic language. Require oral reporting for summarizing group work. Include oral presentations in the content classroom.
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preview the text content with pictures, demos, charts, or experiences. Pair students to read one text together. Preview text with a Picture Walk. Use Choral Reading. Use *Teacher Read Alouds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use Card Sorts. Use K-W-L charts before reading. Use the Language Experience Approach. Provide a list of important concepts on a graphic organizer. Use *Shared Reading and/or simplify the text. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a content vocabulary Word Bank with non-linguistic representations. Teach skimming for specific information. Use Teach the Text Backwards. Use 4 to 1 for main ideas from text. Use *Guided Reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model the creation of a Story Map from a narrative. Provide Question Answer Relationship questions for student pairs to research. Use Directed Reading Thinking Activity. Use Cornell Notes. Use *Jigsaw Reading to scaffold independent reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require computer and library research. Ask students to analyze text structure and select an appropriate Graphic Organizer for summarizing. Use *Reciprocal Teaching to scaffold independent reading.
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require students to label visuals and/or create language balloons. Require vocabulary notebooks with L1 translations or non-linguistic representations. Provide *Key Sentence Frames with word and picture banks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach note taking on a Graphic Organizer. Use a Roving Chart in small group work. Use Interactive Journals. Use *Think-Write-Pair-Share. Provide Cloze sentences with a Word Bank. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require Learning Logs for summaries of learning. Use Text to Graphics and Back Again. Teach Signal Words (comparison, chronology, cause-effect, and listing) for academic writing. Provide *Cloze paragraphs with a *Word Bank. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide Rubrics and exemplars to scaffold writing assignments. Teach and utilize the writing process. Provide an outline for the standard five-paragraph essay. Provide *Report Frames for independent, structured, content writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require academic writing and the use of target academic vocabulary. *Teach the process of writing a research paper. Address students' cultures in differing genres of writing. Hold frequent writing conferences with teacher and peers.

*Starred strategies are described in the summary document on the following page, "The Go To Strategies Matrix: Scaffolding Across Language Proficiency Levels."