

Holding High Standards for Academic Writing in the English Classroom with English Language Learners

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THE ISSUE

Academic writing is at worst impossible, and at best challenging for English Language Learners (ELLs). Traditionally ELLs struggle with academic writing in the classroom. Due to this, often their grades and confidence are lower than their native speaking peers. The English Department at the Health and Human Services High School on the Lawrence High School Campus wanted to come up with a tool ELLs would be able to use to help improve both their writing and confidence in an academic setting.

Open Response Sentence Starter Toolkit

The end product is the Open Response Sentence Starter Toolkit. Piloted in 9th and 10th grade English Language Arts over the 2014-2015 school year, the sentence starters proved to be extremely beneficial for ELLs.

DESCRIPTION

The ELLs were first exposed to the sentence starters in exemplar essays in class. After identifying and becoming comfortable with them in the sample essays, the students were given the task of revising a piece of their writing to incorporate them.

From there, the sentence starters were kept in a special section of their binder that they were able to refer to whenever they were writing.

Throughout the year, any time writing was taking place in class, the students would be encouraged to use the sentence starter toolkit to aide them in forming their responses. The variety of options provided by the sentence starters allowed ELLs to try different types of sentences, letting them experiment and decide the ones they were most comfortable and confident using. In addition to building their confidence, the assorted sentence starter options let their writing truly be their own, and not a formulaic response.

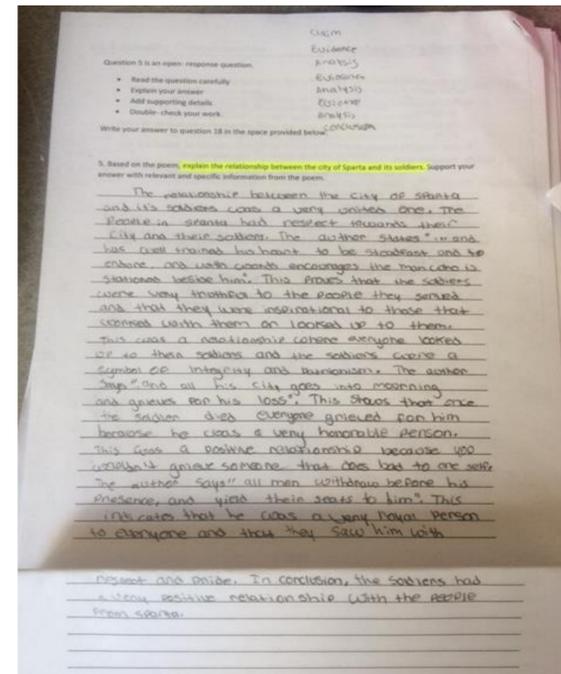
The sentence starters allowed the ELLs to participate in peer editing, revising and whole class sharing with confidence.

The key to using the sentence starters was consistency. Students were exposed to the sentence starters on a daily basis in different ways. ELA teachers had large posters with the sentence starter toolkit hanging in their classrooms. All teacher modeled writing included the use of the sentence starters. Additionally, students were strongly encouraged to keep the sentence starters on their desks while writing in class. Due to consistent use, the majority of students were able to internalize the sentence starters that they felt were most useful and effective for them when writing.

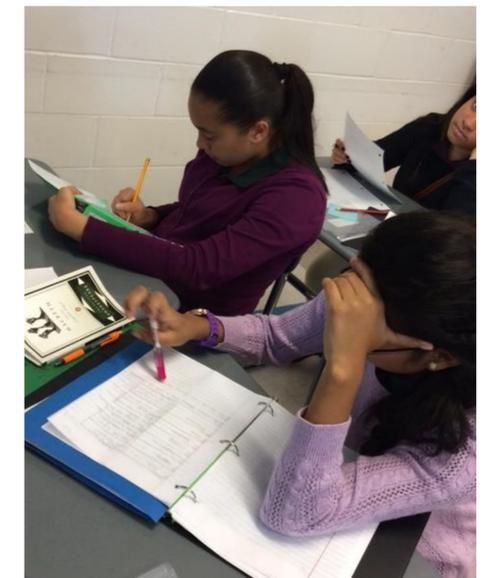
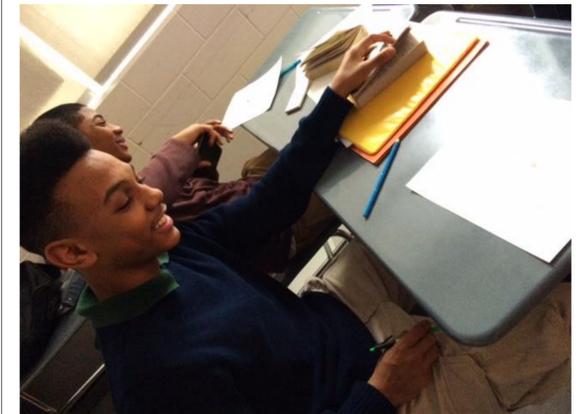
The Open Response Sentence Starter Toolkit is a useful tool for English Language Learners. It not only helps them write stronger academically but also gives them a sense of confidence and pride in their writing.

Open Response Sentence Starter Toolbox

Topic Sentences: identifying information, answer to the question, 3 reasons	Based on the excerpt "_____," by _____, the _____ because/through/by/is/are _____, _____, and _____.
Transition/Reason #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the beginning of the excerpt, ... First of all, ... The excerpt first conveys that _____ when _____.
Evidence #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author claims/illustrates/delineates, "_____," (paragraph _____). (author) _____ demonstrates that "_____," (paragraph _____). Paragraph _____ describes "_____," (paragraph _____). Readers note that "_____," (paragraph _____). The author goes on to elaborate/explore/declare "_____," (paragraph _____).
Reasoning/Analysis #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This quote proves that... The quote demonstrates how... Readers can infer that... This is important because... The author progresses his/her point by...
Transition/Reason #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Later in the text, ... The author elaborates on (claim) by also suggesting that (reason #2) In addition to _____, readers also learn that _____. The author claims/illustrates/delineates, "_____," (paragraph _____). (author) _____ demonstrates that "_____," (paragraph _____). Paragraph _____ describes "_____," (paragraph _____). Readers note that "_____," (paragraph _____). The author goes on to elaborate/explore/declare "_____," (paragraph _____).
Reasoning/Analysis #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This quote proves that... This quote demonstrates how... Readers can infer that... This is important because... The author extends his/her point by suggesting that... Furthermore, (author) _____ illustrates (main claim) by/because/through (reason #3) By the end of excerpt, readers learn that... The author concludes (main claim) by arguing (reason #3) Ultimately, by the end of the excerpt, ...
Evidence #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The author claims/illustrates/delineates, "_____," (paragraph _____). (author) _____ demonstrates that "_____," (paragraph _____). Paragraph _____ describes "_____," (paragraph _____). Readers note that "_____," (paragraph _____). The author goes on to elaborate/explore/declare "_____," (paragraph _____).
Reasoning/Analysis #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This quote proves that... This quote demonstrates how... Readers can infer that... This is important because... The author extends his/her point by suggesting that...
Closing Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Readers conclude that... In conclusion, ... All together, these points show that...



APPLICATION



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