**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.

**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 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.