Developing Language or Signs of a Learning Difficulty

Characteristics of Typically Developing ELLs vs. ELLs Who May Have a Learning Difficulty

Typically Developing ELLs	ELLs who may have a Learning Difficulty
Can be expected to make steady progress	Not making progress, or progress is uneven
Will likely lag behind peers in certain areas related to English language learning (e.g., vocabulary, reading comprehension, oral language)	Difficulties are persistent and pervasive despite consistent and targeted instruction
Should perform similarly to peers academically after a few years in school, if they begin school in English at a young age	Has not made the same progress as other students with similar backgrounds (linguistic and academic)
Can be expected to perform similarly to peers on cognitive processing tasks (e.g., memory, phonemic awareness, speed of processing)	Possible deficits in cognitive processing skills
Usually develop word-level skills (i.e., decoding and spelling) and reading fluency with adequate instruction and development	Persistent problems in word reading (decoding), reading fluency, and spelling
Can be expected to develop reading comprehension skills as oral language, knowledge of grammar and sentence structure and vocabulary grows although they will likely always lag behind peers to some extent.	Understanding of written text does not increase as general language knowledge develops. Difficulties are persistent.
Writing skills develop with oral language abilities	Writing is very challenging and is not reflective of oral language skills
Gradually develop academic language, grammatical and morphological skills observed in spoken and written work	Persistent grammatical and morphological difficulties, and limited vocabulary in spoken and written work
Steady progress in all languages spoken when academic support is provided in each	Difficulties in all languages spoken
No history of academic difficulties in home country (if applicable)	Indications of academic difficulties prior to immigration (if applicable)

Literacy Skill Areas: Typical ELL Development and Indicators of Learning Difficulty *Assessment tools are listed in the Resources section at the end of the guide. Assessments are in English unless otherwise noted.*

Phonological Skills: The ability to hear and manipulate the sound components of words.	
What is expected of typically developing ELLs: • Perform similarly to native speakers • Possibly to have some difficulty if native language is phonologically very different from English • Apply phonological skills to both languages	Indicators of a possible learning difficulty: • On-going weaknesses in phonological awareness (e.g., inability to match sounds to letters, hear rhymes, to replace one sound with another, break a word into sounds, blend sounds together)
Can be assessed using: DIBELS; Roswell-Chall Auditory Blending Test; Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation; Test of Auditory Analysis Skills; informal phonological segmentation, matching and blending tasks; identifying rhymes in songs; using "Pig Latin" ***Phonological awareness is considered a key predictor of difficulties with word level reading and spelling. It can be reliably tested in English with ELLs.**	

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Word Reading Skills: Reading words or simple texts by using sight word vocabulary and/or decoding skills.	
What is expected of typically developing ELLs: • Make steady progress • Word-level reading at par with monolingual peers (after a few years of schooling in English) • Read words with reasonable fluency even if other language skills are still not native-like (e.g., oral language, vocabulary, grammar)	Indicators of a possible learning difficulty: • Word reading difficulties in both languages (i.e., home language and English) • Difficulty remembering or naming letters, sounds, and reading sight words accurately and effortlessly • Not progressing despite targeted instruction in word reading
Can be assessed using: DRA, DIBELS, Dolch word lists, reading words out of context with accuracy, being able to sound out unfamiliar words, being able to sound out non or pseudowords, first language assessment	

Spelling: The ability to spell common words using patterns, sounds, visual shape, and memory skills. English spelling is particularly difficult because of the irregularity of the the writing system; spelling doesn't always match pronunciation.	
What is expected of typically developing ELLs: • Make steady progress • Learn from instruction • Apply rules and patterns to new words • Apply what is learned in reading to spelling and vice-versa • Spell as well as native speakers with sufficient classroom instruction • Spell correclty more complex derived words (e.g., *perform-perform**ance;** careful-careful**ly***)	Indicators of a possible learning difficulty: • Persistent spelling errors • Similar error patterns in both languages (if literate in first language) • Unique spelling patterns not attributed to influence of the first language • Difficulty remembering how common words are spelled • Difficulty in spelling the morphological components
Can be assessed using: Kottmeyer Diagnostic Spelling Test, Gentry Developmental Spelling Test, Wechsler Fundamentals, assessment of student performance in spelling of simple and complex words	

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https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OIfi10XbQeMlO3qnjxd7Kg1H9kEmnsKn/view