



Ten English Language Arts Teaching Strategies

The teaching strategies below give concrete approaches for English Language Arts (ELA) instruction in your Transitional Kindergarten (TK) classroom. They are designed to guide developmentally appropriate TK instruction, moving your students along a continuum of learning by bridging the [Preschool Learning Foundations](#) with the [Kindergarten Common Core](#).

Strategy 1: Understanding of Language (Receptive)

Strategy 2: Follows Increasingly Complex Instructions

Strategy 3: Communication of Needs, Feelings, and Interests (Expressive)

Strategy 4: Reciprocal Communication and Conversation

Strategy 5: Comprehension and Analysis of Age-Appropriate Text, Presented by Adults

Strategy 6: Letter and Word Knowledge

Strategy 7: Phonological Awareness

Strategy 8: Emergent Writing

Strategy 9: Print Concepts

Strategy 10: Integrated Approaches for English Language Development and Family Engagement

STRATEGY 1: UNDERSTANDING OF LANGUAGE (RECEPTIVE)

Competency: Child understands increasingly complex communication and language (corresponds with DRDP-SR Measure 16).

	Exploring Competencies	Building Competencies
Embed in Context	When studying parts of the body, lead the class in a song that names the parts of the body while simultaneously pointing to the part.	Lead a group of children discussing the function of the heart and interactively chart the responses. Ask, "Have you ever heard anyone say, 'It breaks my heart'?" What do you think that means?" Listen carefully to the responses, then extend the conversation with another question. Strive to extend the conversation with several "volleys".

Model	At snack time say to your students, “Let’s go to snack and put some nutritious food into our stomachs.” While touching your tummy, repeat the sentence substituting abdomen for stomach and ask the children to practice saying abdomen.	At the end of an active event during P.E., put your hand over your heart and say, “Wow, I can feel my heart beating very fast! I wonder what’s happening. Who has a guess about why our hearts are beating fast?” Take several responses from the group and let your students know that you value different opinions.
Give Opportunities to Practice	During activity time, give students the opportunity to cut and glue body parts onto an outlined form of themselves.	In small groups, give your students the opportunity to use stethoscopes to listen to their own heartbeat and to the heartbeat of friends while experimenting with different levels of movement. Encourage them to talk to one another about their findings.

STRATEGY 2: FOLLOWS INCREASINGLY COMPLEX INSTRUCTIONS

Competency: Child understands and responds to increasingly complex directions and requests (corresponds with DRDP-SR Measure 17).		
	Exploring Competencies	Building Competencies
Embed in Context	Announce that it is time to clean up the block area and sit on the carpet, a two-step direction. Remind your students to look at the labels on the shelf for proper replacement of block sizes and shapes.	Give a four-step direction to a group of students. For example: “Take a plastic cup. Fill it with soil. Put the seed in the center. Cover the seed lightly with soil.”
Model	Compliment children on following directions, repeating each step of the direction they followed.	Model the four steps in planting a seed and then add two more steps: adding water and placing the cup in the sun.
Give Opportunities to Practice	Throughout the week, give each child the opportunity, with support, to be the “Clean-Up Leader.” The leader reminds the class when it is time to clean up and gives directions for clean-up. Routines are practiced throughout the day following simple directions.	Have students use a journal to draw, dictate, write, or any combination of these to show the steps involved in planting a seed.

STRATEGY 3: COMMUNICATION OF NEEDS, FEELINGS, AND INTERESTS (EXPRESSIVE)

Competency: Child uses language to communicate with increasingly complex words and sentences (corresponds with DRDP-SR Measure 18).		
	Exploring Competencies	Building Competencies
Embed in Context	Read the book <i>Growing Vegetable Soup</i> by Lois Ehlert and ask questions about each vegetable and the children’s likes and dislikes. Allow plenty of time for each child to share if they wish to do so.	With a group of children, brainstorm the kinds of vegetables the students would like to plant in a class garden. Also, discuss what tools they will need and ask them what gardening jobs they would like to do. Interactively chart their discussion with pictures and/or writing.
Model	Bring several vegetables to class for tasting. Say: “I like all of these vegetables, but my favorite is broccoli because it’s green and crunchy and it is so good for me.”	Use self-talk: “Let’s see, I’ll need to dig in the soil, I’ll need a shovel. I like to dig. I dug a garden at my home.”
Give Opportunities to Practice	Help each child audio record: “My favorite vegetable is ____.” Then have the students draw their favorite vegetable for a class book and use the audio recording/book for their listening pleasure at the listening center.	During the reading of the story, ask children to think about their favorite vegetable, tell a friend why they like it, and listen to a friend share about their favorite vegetable too.

STRATEGY 4: RECIPROCAL COMMUNICATION AND CONVERSATION

Competency: Child engages in back-and-forth communication that develops into increasingly extended conversations with the appropriate social use of language (corresponds with DRDP-SR Measure 19).		
	Exploring Competencies	Building Competencies
Embed in Context	Read <i>Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day</i> by Judith Viorst to a small group of children. Ask children, with guidance and support, to share their “bad day” experiences and feelings. Provide ample opportunities for back-and-forth exchanges between children to teacher and children to children.	Work with a small group of children to orally “build a story,” perhaps suggesting themes (scary, funny, exciting) for the group to decide upon. Begin by saying, “Once upon a time there were three children who went...” Then allow each student to add the next part of the story. Students self-regulate the conversation and direction of the story. Only intervene when appropriate.

Model	Say: "Yesterday, I wanted to wear my red sweater with the little flowers. I looked under my bed, in the drawers, everywhere! I never found it! Instead, I had to wear my black sweater to school. I felt so frustrated."	At recess and other relaxed social times, engage children in conversation by responding with detail to their questions and, in turn, asking them a question that will extend their comments with more detail.
Give Opportunities to Practice	Give children many opportunities throughout the day to engage in conversations with other children and with adults in the classroom. The use of board games encourages children to discuss rules and to practice taking turns.	Give children the opportunity, in pairs or small groups, to act out their story or to make up a new story using pictures or props. From time to time, providing an audience can be very motivating for some children.

STRATEGY 5: COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS OF AGE-APPROPRIATE TEXT, PRESENTED BY ADULTS

Competency: Child understands and responds to details and ideas from age-appropriate text presented by adults (corresponds with DRDP-SR Measure 20).		
	Exploring Competencies	Building Competencies
Embed in Context	Read the predictable book <i>Cookie's Week</i> by Cindy Ward with a small group or to an individual child and use dialogic techniques . Stop the story to ask, "What do you think will happen after Cookie knocks the plant off the windowsill?" After the child answers, extend the conversation by asking, "Have you ever knocked something over? What happened then?"	Read the book <i>Ira Sleeps Over</i> by Bernard Waber to a group of children. With guidance and support, have the children retell the story naming the characters and the setting. Ask children about what they think will happen next. "Do you think Ira is worried about something? What do you think Ira might be worried about?" Children make connections to the story by sharing information about something that gives them comfort when they are going to sleep.
Model	Share your thinking strategies with the class. "I'm thinking Cookie is not really a bad little cat. He just seems to have many accidents. I'm thinking he's very interested in learning about new things. I think Cookie is mischievous!"	Share your thinking strategies with the class. "I'm thinking Ira needs his teddy bear so he won't be afraid and so he won't miss his mommy and daddy. His friend feels the same and needs his teddy bear, too."
Give Opportunities to Practice	Provide several copies of the book for the children to picture-walk through the book and retell the story to their book buddy.	Give children a story frame (three large squares drawn horizontally across the page) and ask them to draw, dictate, write, or any combination to show the beginning, middle, and end of the story.

STRATEGY 6: LETTER AND WORD KNOWLEDGE

Competency: Child shows increasing awareness of symbols and letters in the environment and their relationship to sound, and understands that letters make up words (corresponds with DRDP-SR Measure 21).

	Exploring Competencies	Building Competencies
Embed in Context	<p>During morning opening routines and transitional times, have the whole group stand to sing the letter names and clap out the letters on the wall. Have the Student of the Day use a pointer to focus the children's attention on the correct letter.</p>	<p>With your support and guidance, a small group of children sit on the carpet in a circle using chalk or white boards to write CVC words. Give a word like "cat," exaggerating each sound while the children write the word. Ask the children for other rhyming words. As a child gives a word, like "rat," repeat the word again, exaggerating each sound while the children write. Also write the word and show it to the group so they can self-check and correct. Encourage them to help each other if someone needs assistance.</p>
Model	<p>Sing with the children and say the name of the letter clearly. Then write the Student of the Day's name on the board and cheer each letter. For example: "Give me an A-M-Y. What does that spell? Amy, Amy, Amy! Y-e-a-h Amy!" Later in the year, the Student of the Day is able to lead the cheer. Using a pom-pom makes it even more engaging.</p>	<p>Say: "I'm beginning to see a pattern. There are some of the same letters in all these words, at, at, at. Let's choose another letter pattern. Can you see the letters that are the same?"</p>
Give Opportunities to Practice	<p>During free choice time, give children the opportunity to manipulate magnetic boards with letters using name cards and picture cards with labels to support the new learners. Later, other manipulatives can be substituted (e.g., chalk boards, felt boards and letters, play dough and cookie cutter letters).</p>	<p>Give children the opportunity to choose from the variety of letters and boards or paper and writing tools to experiment with letters and words. Encourage them to write a word or sentence and read it to someone in the room.</p>

STRATEGY 7: PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Competency: Child shows awareness of the sounds that make up language, including the ability to manipulate sounds in language (corresponds with DRDP-SR Measure 22).

	Exploring Competencies	Building Competencies
Embed in Context	<p>At regular and predictable transition times (e.g., returning from outdoors, lining for meals, the end of large group time) lead the group of children in rhyming songs. For example: “Willoughby, Walloughby Woo.” Select a new beginning sound for the children to use to rhyme with each child’s name.</p>	<p>Work with a small group with a card showing a picture and the letters of a word like cat, for example. Have the children read the word with the help of the picture. Then change the letter “c” for the letter “h.” The children, with your help and support, sound out the word and find the picture of the hat to replace the one of the cat. When the children can easily perform this activity, change the vowel pattern and continue practicing beginning sound substitution or switch to ending sound substitution.</p>
Model	<p>Model the song for the children until they know the tune, words, and expectation for their participation.</p>	<p>Model the above activity and use self-talk as you walk through the process. Ask for a volunteer to take your place. After the child completes the task, they choose the next volunteer.</p>
Give Opportunities to Practice	<p>Give children the opportunity during free choice to manipulate rhyming pictures on a hanging word chart. The directions are to choose three pictures whose names rhyme and place them in a row on the hanging chart. There are three sets of rhyming words.</p>	<p>Place the hanging chart with the pictures and letters that have been practiced together in an area for the children to manipulate and assist one another during free choice time. A new set of CVC words and pictures can be substituted every few days for further independent practice.</p>

STRATEGY 8: EMERGENT WRITING

Competency: Child shows increasing ability to write using scribbles, symbols, letters, and words to represent meaning (corresponds with DRDP-SR Measure 23).

	Exploring Competencies	Building Competencies
Embed in Context	<p>Read the book <i>Franklin Goes to School</i> by Paulette Bourgeois, then discuss with the class all the things Franklin did to get ready to go to school. Ask the children about the things they do before coming to school and chart their comments. Then ask each child to draw a picture of what they do in the morning to get ready for school, inviting them to add words if they would like, adding, “Remember this is your idea and your paper. There are many ways to draw and write. I’m excited to see your finished paper.”</p>	<p>The same lesson may be used for all levels of writers—beginning, developing, and mastery. Each child self-regulates the writing process to meet their developmental needs. Keeping in mind the importance of risk-taking and experimenting in the process of learning to write, watch for and encourage conventions as they creep into their writing, saying, for example, “Great job leaving a space between the words!” Every child will become a writer with your support and guidance, along with many levels of concrete scaffolding materials in the classroom.</p>
Model	<p>Ask for a volunteer to tell the class what they did this morning to get ready to come to school. Say: “I’m going to write your sentence on the board.” Write the student’s words, “I ate Cheerios for breakfast,” sounding out each word. Say: “I want to draw a picture to go with my sentence,” then draw a picture of the child at a table eating Cheerios.</p>	<p>Throughout the day, provide demonstrations of what is involved in being a writer: making lists, labeling, writing stories, and writing to the children.</p>
Give Opportunities to Practice	<p>The writing center is a free choice area available to the children every day. The center is well stocked with a wide variety of paper, white boards, clip boards, crayons, markers, and chalk. Change supplies frequently to encourage children to write. At arrival every day, have a sign in for each child to write or symbolize their name. You or a volunteer model how to make each letter of the child’s name.</p>	<p>Give children the opportunity to write every day. Have them keep journals where they are easily accessible. Ensure word charts, name charts, picture files, and books are also at their disposal whenever they are writing. At least once a day, ask the children to write about something of their choice. They may pull ideas from a picture wall, brainstormed charts, books, classroom activities, from each other or from their own experiences. Encourage them to draw and/or write, and to listen to sounds and write as many sounds as they are able to hear.</p>

STRATEGY 9: PRINT CONCEPTS

Competency: Child understands and is able to identify information about texts and the use of print (corresponds with Common Core Reading Standards: Foundational Skills).

	Exploring Competencies	Building Competencies
Embed in Context	Each time you read to a group of children use the name for the parts of the book: cover, spine, title, author, table of contents, and illustrator. Also use big books to point to the starting word and to track from left to right and top to bottom.	Encourage writing during free choice activities. When a child writes a story or sequence of events, be available to help the child decide on a name for his story. Interchange the two words, name and title, as you work together and all students sign their work as the author/writer. Use the vocabulary frequently throughout the day.
Model	Pretend to be stumped. "I don't know where to begin reading on this page." Point to the bottom of the page and say, "I think I'll start here." You read, but it doesn't make sense. Ask for a volunteer to show you where to start. A child points to the correct place. You read and ask the children if it now makes sense. You stop at the end of each line and ask for another volunteer to direct you to the next line.	Demonstrate print concepts when charting or doing interactive writing with a group of children. For example, when you get to the end of a line, say, "I'm going to go back to the left side right under my last line to begin writing again. I'm not finished with my thought yet so I don't need a period to tell the reader to stop."
Give Opportunities to Practice	Provide children with time and places throughout the room to look at favorite books and big books. You can target specific learners to engage them in conversation about print while you read the book the child or children have chosen.	Provide children with pre-decodable and decodable books to read to adults or to other children. Children also practice their knowledge of print concepts when they are engaged in writing, which is always an option during free choice activity time. Ask children to be detectives and find all the question marks in a familiar book.

STRATEGY 10: INTEGRATED APPROACHES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Competency: Child understands and is able to identify information about texts and the use of print (corresponds with Common Core Reading Standards: Foundational Skills).

Integrated Approach: English Language Development	<p>Provide English Learners (ELs) with scaffolds to understand and learn new vocabulary associated with concepts being introduced in each lesson and throughout the day. For example, moving from demonstrating new vocabulary through gestures to saying the words to using the word in a conversation. Ensure that ELs have multiple opportunities to engage and participate through small group and dyad activities. For example, Interactive Dialogic Reading increases all children’s—not just ELs’—oral language (social and academic English) and addresses the development of key components of literacy. In addition, the use of frequent formative assessments should be implemented, but interpreted with caution to ensure that performance indicating students’ level of content knowledge is not obscured by their English language proficiency skills.</p>
Collaborative Approach: Family Engagement	<p>Aggregate children’s developmental progress data and communicate it with families in the language they prefer, creating bridges to academic English whenever appropriate. Set goals with families ensuring that support is provided. For example, schools can organize a family event that focuses on dialogic reading strategies to do at home.</p>