



Listening. Learning. Leading.®



English Learner Formative Assessment (ELFA)

ELFA Teacher's Guide

Jane R. Shore, Mikyung Kim Wolf, and Ian Blood

November 2013

English Learner Formative Assessment (ELFA) was created by researchers and assessment developers at Educational Testing Service (ETS) with the collaboration of research partners at the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, & Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA. The overall goals of the ELFA project are to provide English learners with reading strategies that promote improved comprehension and to inform instruction of those strategies for English learners in U.S. middle schools.

The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant Number R305A100724 to ETS. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

The authors would like to thank Mary Fowles, Donald Powers, and Caroline Wylie for their helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this Teacher's Guide document. The authors also gratefully acknowledge the research assistance of Jennifer Wain and Kristin Williamson-Worden and the editorial assistance of Kim Fryer. Finally, the authors acknowledge the teachers who have provided their valuable feedback during the development of this document.

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
<i>What is the purpose of the Teacher’s Guide?</i>	2
<i>What is ELFA?</i>	2
Section 1: Background and Rationale for the ELFA Assessment	3
<i>Meeting the needs of our nation’s English learners</i>	3
<i>Foundational principles of the ELFA project</i>	3
<i>Rising to the challenge</i>	3
Section 2: About Formative Assessment	4
<i>Different needs, different assessments</i>	4
<i>Characteristics of effective formative assessment</i>	4
<i>What does a “formative” assessment look like?</i>	5
<i>Formative assessment and diverse learners</i>	6
<i>Targeted and differentiated instruction</i>	6
<i>Descriptive feedback</i>	6
<i>Flexibility</i>	7
Section 3: Overview of the ELFA Assessment Forms	8
<i>Who is ELFA for?</i>	8
<i>What does ELFA measure?</i>	8
<i>ELFA item and task design principles</i>	9
<i>Sequence of items in the ELFA forms</i>	10
<i>The reading passages</i>	10
<i>Structure of the forms: Parts 1 and 2</i>	11
<i>ELFA Teacher’s Versions</i>	13
Section 4: Frequently Asked Questions	16
<i>What does feedback look like in a formative assessment?</i>	16
<i>How do I introduce the ELFA forms to my students?</i>	16
<i>Can I add or skip items from the forms?</i>	16
<i>Are there grades?</i>	17
<i>Does the ELFA have lower- or higher-level forms?</i>	17
<i>How can ELFA help me bring successful formative assessment to my classroom?</i>	17
References	18
Appendix A: Glossary for Reading Terms in the Teacher’s Versions	19
Appendix B: Glossary for Linguistic Terms in the Teacher’s Versions	21
Appendix C: ELFA Formative Techniques Glossary	22

Introduction

What is the purpose of the Teacher's Guide?

This guide introduces the background and purpose of the ELFA assessments and makes general suggestions for teachers about how to use ELFA in the classroom. The Teacher's Guide *does not* contain detailed suggestions for using specific items and activities — those appear in the ELFA Teacher's Versions that accompany each form (see Section 3 for more details). Rather, this guide provides a general overview of the ELFA assessments, a short introduction to formative assessment and collaborative learning, and a section with answers to frequently asked questions. This guide also may be used as a resource for teachers in discussing formative assessment for English learners (ELs) with colleagues.

What is ELFA?

ELFA stands for English Learner Formative Assessment. ELFA is designed to provide teachers of EL students with a much-needed means to assess, understand, and adapt instruction based on evidence of student learning, which will ultimately facilitate the development of students' academic reading skills. ELFA contains a series of classroom-based academic reading assessment forms and supportive materials that teachers can use with EL students in the middle grades.¹ ELFA assessments provide information about students' skills and competencies in reading and are intended to complement other forms of learning evidence (such as student work and teacher observations), empowering teachers to plan instruction that is highly responsive to their students' reading development needs. (A short introduction to formative assessment is provided in Section 2 of this guide.)

ELFA includes nine assessment forms, a Teacher's Version of each form, this ELFA Teacher's Guide, and a scoring and data management software tool called ELFA Notebook.² These materials are designed to facilitate the teacher's assessment of students' academic reading abilities in a systematic and formative way. The nine assessment forms target a range of academic reading levels and focus on the development of specific vocabulary, sentence and discourse level understanding, and analyzing argument structure. The supplemental Teacher's Versions offer suggestions, specific to each item on each form, on how to target and confirm student skills at each level. Using ELFA Notebook, teachers can quickly enter students' assessment responses, record their own observations, view charts and tables to see how students are performing in three reading skill areas, and compile learning evidence for each student over time.

The ELFA assessments are informed by both educational theory and empirical research. They have been piloted with EL students in classrooms across the United States, and we have listened to the advice of many teachers of ELs in the development and refinement of the assessments.

Please note: Teachers should use their best judgment to decide whether the ELFA assessments are appropriately challenging for their students. Reviewing levels and scores from state English language proficiency tests might help teachers make decisions about whether students are ready for the ELFA assessments. The students should, at minimum, be able to read the passages fairly fluently and work on at least a portion of the items successfully.

¹ Please note that the ELFA package can be used by English as a Second Language (ESL), English Language Development (ELD), bilingual, and mainstream teachers.

² Currently ELFA Notebook is still a prototype. You will not be using ELFA Notebook for this study.

Section 1: Background and Rationale for the ELFA Assessment

Meeting the needs of our nation's English learners

Heightened attention has been paid to EL students in recent years. They are the fastest growing subgroup in K–12 public schools in the United States. It is expected that the number of school-age children of immigrants will continue to increase by nearly 48% (17.9 million) from 2010 to 2020.³ Despite the increased attention that ELs have received, they have struggled academically. Outcomes for ELs on standardized tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show a wide achievement gap between ELs and other groups, especially in reading.

Fostering the reading skills of EL students needs to be a national educational priority. The ability to read increasingly complex academic English texts is critical for accessing knowledge in all subject areas. Therefore, EL students face a dual challenge: to *learn English* and to *use English to learn* in all the content subjects.

A large body of literature identifies effective strategies to improve EL education. Based on current theories and research, the ELFA project adopts the principles of effective formative assessment. **The ELFA project addresses the critical need for effective instructional tools by providing teachers with a series of research-based assessments to help gather formative information about their students' reading ability and monitor their growth over time.**

Foundational principles of the ELFA project

- *Formative assessment helps improve EL students' learning by providing immediately useful information to both students and teachers about students' strengths and areas of need.*
- *Explicit reading comprehension skills and strategies instruction and practice can benefit English learners who are struggling to read and comprehend grade-level academic content.*
- *There is a core set of critical reading-comprehension skills and strategies that are important to include in a reading assessment to maximize its authenticity, depth, and usefulness as a tool in the teacher's repertoire.*
- *Collaborative reading activities can raise students' motivation to read and, thus, can be used to facilitate engagement in a meaningful reading assessment process. In addition, collaborative activities give learners the chance to consolidate and strengthen their knowledge by sharing it with others.*

Rising to the challenge

Though no two learners are alike, ELs at the middle school level are expected to take the same state assessments as their native-English-speaking peers after their first year in U.S. schools. Teachers and parents of ELs know the importance of holding ELs to the same high academic standards as other students, but it can sometimes be hard to know exactly how to do so when faced with the challenge of helping students learn content in a second language. In the ELFA research and development project, our goal is to work with teachers to support and aid in strengthening formative assessment practices to meet the needs of EL students.

³ Passel & Cohn, 2008.

Section 2: About Formative Assessment

Different needs, different assessments

Assessment is about collecting information on student learning. It is a means of answering questions about students — what they know and can do. This information can be used in many different ways. Some assessment results may be used during lesson planning, and other information might influence decisions around grading, placement, or giving feedback. Assessments differ widely in their design, content, format, use, and philosophy. So, different types of assessments have different roles to play.

The ELFA project focuses on **formative assessment**. In a balanced assessment system, there are two main types of assessment practices: formative and summative. A **summative assessment** is an activity used as part of an evaluation or reporting process that provides information on student learning at a particular point in time, usually after instruction has been completed. Summative assessments include state assessments used for accountability purposes, program evaluation, or to measure students' achievement of grade-level standards. Generally speaking, summative assessments are not designed to provide information for adapting instruction because they are usually administered at the end of the school year, when it is too late to make instructional adjustments.

There is no universally agreed-upon description for what formative assessment should look like in the field. However, one universal characteristic of formative assessment is that it is a practice used primarily for providing information that can help teachers advance learning throughout the course of instruction, not just after it has occurred.⁴ One way to think of formative assessment is assessment *for* learning (as opposed to assessment *of* learning). Summative assessment is assessment *of* learning. It seeks to measure what a student knows, with no explicit purpose to help students move closer to their learning goals. Formative assessment, on the other hand, is about advancing learning by identifying the gap between a student's current level and a desired learning goal and providing feedback to reduce this gap.⁵

Effective formative assessment has the characteristics outlined below.

Characteristics of effective formative assessment

1. **Effective formative assessment is part of the instructional process.** Formative assessment is not a kind of test, quiz, or worksheet. Formative assessment is a process. No matter what an assessment looks like or what its designers intend it to be used for, it is only formative if it is used in a formative way — that is, as part of an ongoing process to feed learning evidence into instructional decision making to help teachers meet their students' needs.
2. **Effective formative assessment is transparent and explicit.** It is transparent because teachers share the assessment criteria and the learning goals with students. It is explicit because it leads to specific instruction that targets these assessment criteria and learning goals. Ideally, students participate in assessing their own abilities and are able to articulate information about their own learning goals, process, and growth.

⁴ Heritage, 2010; Wylie, Lyon, & Goe, 2009.

⁵ Heritage, Kim, Vendlinski, & Herman, 2009; Sadler, 1989.

3. **Effective formative assessment provides information that is needed to adjust teaching and learning while they are happening.** If classroom assessment does not provide information that helps teachers make adjustments to maximize learning, or if this information is provided too late in the instructional process to make adjustments, then the assessment is not serving a formative purpose.
4. **Effective formative assessment is goal-oriented.** For any learning goal, methods should be devised to measure progress towards the goal and evaluate critical abilities that may need to be developed to reach the goal. This is a multipronged effort that involves careful planning and recordkeeping, trial and error, asking questions that might not have “right” answers, and being creative about collecting multiple forms of learning evidence.
5. **Effective formative assessment promotes students’ integral involvement in their own assessment and learning.** Students can play the role of critic (evaluating their own understandings and the work of their peers), assessment designer (devising tests to measure progress towards learning goals), instructor (helping their peers reach learning goals), and learner (seeking help and information from teachers and peers). Effective teachers find ways to foster students’ agency and autonomy in their assessment practices.
6. **Effective formative assessment provides rich descriptive feedback to learners.** Percentages and letter grades have a place in learning, but they do not help students answer the question that they should always be asking: What do I need to do to move forward? Effective formative assessment emphasizes constructive feedback over scores.
7. **Effective formative assessment does not lead to reteaching, but rather to innovative teaching.** That is to say, when weak points are discovered using an assessment, this information should be used to revisit what was not understood the first time in a new way that is informed by all of the learning evidence available to the teacher.
8. **Effective formative assessment is a portfolio, not a snapshot.** Summative assessment is like a snapshot. It captures a student’s overall ability at one point in time. Formative assessment is more like a portfolio of learners’ abilities. Teachers collect different pieces of evidence over time to tell each learner’s story and gain a fuller picture of each learner’s profile of strengths and needs.

What does a “formative” assessment look like?

There is no simple answer to this question — or rather, there are many answers. The critical component that makes any activity a formative assessment is that it provides feedback to learners and information to teachers that can help in instruction. A formative assessment can take many shapes to achieve this overarching goal. It might look like a learning activity, such as a set of questions that provides information to teachers, engages students in meaningful learning tasks, and guides students towards understanding their own abilities. It may be teacher-directed, or it may be enacted through peer work with the teacher present as an observer and facilitator. Students may be included in the creation of their own assessments, with the teacher observing this process to draw conclusions about students’ awareness of the learning goals and their progress toward them. In well-functioning formative classrooms, formative

assessment is not just one activity, but a culture of transparent goal setting, evidence gathering, feedback creation, goal evaluation, and instructional adaptation in which both teachers and students take ownership.

Formative assessment and diverse learners

ELs are a diverse group, not just in their cultural, ethnic, and linguistic profiles, but in other critical areas such as length of time in the United States, their families' educational and economic backgrounds, their current level of English reading ability, and their level of comfort at school. A single classroom can include students with various past experiences and present needs. One of the greatest challenges facing any teacher is the need to provide instruction and feedback that is relevant to each learner's needs.

Targeted and differentiated instruction

Teachers can use formative assessments to group students by skill levels to monitor individuals' reading development over the course of the year. When students are grouped by ability, teachers can then plan differently for each group, thus maximizing the benefit of classroom time for all learners. These groupings can be flexible, with learners paired differently depending on the learning goal. This is especially important for linguistically diverse learners, as one way to group learners, depending on the goals of an activity, involves finding individuals with similar language challenges or language backgrounds and providing specific, targeted attention.

Descriptive feedback

While some forms of assessment share minimal information between teachers and learners, formative assessment emphasizes **descriptive feedback**. Descriptive feedback is information about a student's performance that targets particular learning areas and indicates ways a student might improve in them. This type of feedback is especially important for ELs.⁶ In fact, research suggests that descriptive feedback is the most significant instructional strategy for moving students forward in their learning.⁷ In the middle school classroom, giving and receiving descriptive feedback also gives students opportunities to learn constructive language and the art of tactful criticism, both of which are important elements of academic language. Some existent literature provides concrete, useful examples of feedback types.⁸

⁶ Durán, 2008.

⁷ Butler, 1987, 1988; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996.

⁸ See Brookhart, 2008 for the examples of feedback.

Flexibility

Another benefit of formative assessment for English learners is its **flexibility**. While structured, standardized assessment conditions are important for large-scale summative testing, classroom assessment should be flexible and adapted to the needs of learners. For learners with less experience in the culture of mainstream American classrooms and less familiarity with traditional written assessments, it is critical to give these students opportunities to show their knowledge, skills, and abilities in ways that are familiar to them, while at the same time initiating them into common American academic practices. With formative assessment, learning outcomes are more important than strict procedures, grades, and test security, so teachers are encouraged to use and adapt formative assessments in any way that makes sense for their classrooms. For example, a teacher might choose to skip or add questions to Part 1 of an ELFA assessment or to plan a special activity, such as a classroom debate or individual writing activity based on the reading passage. It's all about what the assessment can teach you about your learners, and what it can teach your learners about themselves.

Section 3: Overview of the ELFA Assessment Forms

Who is ELFA for?

The ELFA assessments are designed for **ELs in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade whose English ability is intermediate or advanced**. Throughout the design and development process, we gave careful consideration to the needs of long-term ELs (i.e., students who have been designated as ELs since elementary school) and, in particular, to those students whose oral English proficiency is stronger than their reading comprehension.⁹

The ELFA forms address the needs of ELs with intermediate or advanced English language proficiency. They are designed to address critical issues and skills required of learners as they develop their abilities and begin to transition to mainstream classes, or the equivalent in various settings.

What does ELFA measure?

To design the questions that appear in each ELFA form, we reviewed the research on ESL and EL reading in middle school, highlighting those skills identified as key to achieving high academic literacy. By focusing each ELFA item on a single reading skill, we create the opportunity to analyze ability levels for specific skill areas. Table 1 below outlines the skills that inform our item design.

Table 1. ELFA Construct: Three Reading Skill Areas

Reading Skills Measured in the ELFA Assessments

Skill areas	Skills
<i>Prerequisite skills for understanding literal meaning</i>	Academic lexical ability (e.g., comprehending academic words, understanding word parts)
	Interpreting or unpacking grammatical structures to comprehend the meaning of a sentence in academic text (e.g., correctly interpreting the meaning of a sentence containing the passive voice)
<i>Understanding literal meaning</i>	Comprehending details (e.g., correctly answering questions of fact based on what is explicitly written in the article)
	Comprehending main ideas and arguments (e.g., recognizing the author's main argument and the general reasons for the author's opinion)
<i>Going beyond literal meaning: Higher-order skills</i>	Drawing inferences and conclusions (e.g., understanding what the author implies but doesn't explicitly write, drawing conclusions about the author's motivation)
	Analyzing argument structure (For the purpose of ELFA, we define this as understanding the organization of information or the structure of the author's arguments.)
	Making connections between texts (e.g., comparing and contrasting two authors' views, identifying conflicting information and areas of agreement)
	Evaluating (e.g., forming and describing one's own opinion on the issue addressed by the author, pointing out weaknesses in the author's argument)

⁹ We realize that many students who may benefit from the methods and activities used in the ELFA may no longer be receiving ESL services. Though our research has focused on ESL classrooms specifically, future work in regular education classrooms may be done.

ELFA item and task design principles

The following principles from research on formative assessment have guided all aspects of the design and development of ELFA assessments:

- Provide a **purpose for reading**. When we read, we do it for a reason. The more authentic and motivating our reasons, the more skill and effort we bring to the task. To help ensure that the ELFA forms capture students' best efforts, each form provides an authentic reading situation.
- Provide **scaffolded tasks**. In scaffolded tasks, students progress through several levels of difficulty for a particular skill. Such tasks are less frustrating for lower-level learners, and they allow teachers to formulate hypotheses about what a learner's next steps should be. For example, a first step in a scaffolded task might be to work with a partner to fill in blank spaces in a passage with words from a word bank. Next, students might discuss the sentences and meanings with their partners and try to guess or define the words they used to fill in the blanks. Finally, students decide whether the words within the sentences are presented as facts or opinions. In this scaffolded sequence, learners have multiple opportunities to understand both the vocabulary and the passages and can use their peers as partners.
- Arrange tasks in a **meaningful sequence**. The order of tasks in the ELFA assessment anticipates the challenges a student may face in reading a passage. Early items focus on basic skills and getting the gist, while later items delve into deeper levels of comprehension or locating specific information.
- Ensure that the tasks **yield evidence of student learning** that is potentially useful for teachers and students.
- Make sure that the **activities included can themselves be viewed as reading and learning activities**, not just assessment activities. In other words, make sure that the ELFA assessment tasks consist of inherently worthwhile activities on which students can use their reading strategies and in fact help students' comprehension of the texts.
- Provide **opportunities for students to interact and to engage in discussion** while completing the tasks. Sharing information and skills with others strengthens our own mastery of them. It is of particular importance for EL students to have ample opportunities to discuss the text verbally. The ELFA assessments should provide opportunities for students to learn from their peers and share what they know.
- Provide **clear directions**. The directions must be clear and free of unnecessary complexity in language.
- **Incorporate strategy use**. The assessments do not measure the use of strategies directly, but they explicitly encourage learners to use beneficial strategies.

Sequence of items in the ELFA forms

To determine the ordering of items in ELFA, we anticipated the stages a middle school EL might go through when reading a particular text for the purpose stated in each task in the assessment. Not every student will naturally follow these stages in the same order, but we believe that this progression replicates a natural experience for most learners.

Beginning of each form

Get the main idea and author’s purpose at the first glance. The student should first recognize the topic and main idea about the text — that is, can the student get a very basic idea of what the passage is about (and what position the author supports) from the first reading? The earliest items on the form measure this ability.

Middle of each form

Get the details. Does the student understand the key explicit information in the reading that supports the author’s main idea or argument?

Understand academic vocabulary. Does the student understand key academic words, polysemous words (words with multiple meanings), and morphologically complex words in the reading? If not, does the student employ strategies to learn the meaning of key words?

Interpret academic grammar. Can the student comprehend sentences containing complex grammatical structures like those that appear in academic readings?

End of each form

Understand text and argument structure. Does the student understand the structure of ideas in the author’s argument and the paragraph structure of the reading?

Drawing inferences and conclusions. Does the student understand what is implied by the author, but not explicitly stated? Does the student draw reasonable conclusions from the reading?

Integration and evaluation. Can the student answer simple questions requiring the integration of information from two readings? Can the student evaluate arguments on the basis of reasons and evidence? Can the student form a coherent opinion based on ideas in the reading?

The reading passages

ELFA focuses on **persuasive genre texts**, such as newspaper editorials and essays. The persuasive genre texts were developed to be engaging and meaningful and resemble those that middle school students encounter. Additionally, the persuasive genre texts allowed for assessing important reading skills specified in college- and career-ready standards (e.g., close reading of the text, evaluating the logic of reasoning, and citing textual evidence).

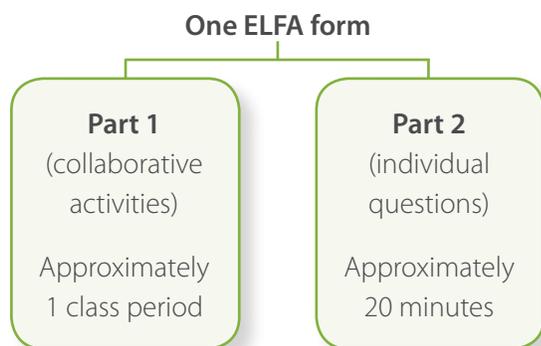
Both human and computer-driven measures of text readability were used to ensure that the reading passages are appropriate for English learners.¹⁰ Through a combination of human ratings, readability estimates, and evaluations of passages conducted by Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools, we have categorized the texts into three levels for *Developing*, *Intermediate*, and *Experienced* readers.

In each main passage, an author makes an argument supported by reasoning and evidence in about 500 words. Each main passage is also accompanied by a much shorter passage that argues against the position taken by the author of the main passage. By presenting two sides of an issue, the assessment enables learners to discuss their opinions and evaluate the arguments presented, which can be developed into further oral classroom activities.

Teachers may select any of the ELFA assessment forms that are appropriate for their students based on their own evaluation of student proficiency using available standardized or classroom data. For example, teachers may choose to use three forms at the Developing reader level or two forms at the same level, followed by a more challenging form. Note that the goal of the ELFA project is for teachers to integrate ELFA materials into their daily instruction and to use ELFA forms as a mechanism to systematically collect students' learning evidence and tailor teachers' instruction.

Structure of the forms: Parts 1 and 2

Figure 1. Structure of each ELFA form.



In total, there are nine separate ELFA assessment forms. They are designed to be used over the course of nine weeks or more. ELFA is a paper-based assessment, and each form takes about 1 ½ class periods to complete, split up into two parts, as illustrated in Figure 1. However, the duration of the assessment time and selection of certain items and tasks is up to teachers, considering the daily lesson plans and students' levels. **Depending on how you plan to use Part 1, it may take more than two class periods of time to have students complete Part 1 during your instruction.** You are responsible for scoring the forms yourself. A data management and score reporting tool, ELFA Notebook (in development and available soon), can speed up the task of scoring and facilitate your efforts to learn from the data you have collected.

¹⁰ Greenfield, 2004; Sheehan, Kostin, Futagi, & Flor, 2010.

Part 1

Part 1 of each form is a collaborative assessment and learning activity. Students should work with partners or groups to read the passages and answer the questions in Part 1. This is intended to provide an opportunity for students to learn together, to encourage each other, to engage in activities that demonstrate knowledge and skills, to practice reading strategies, to be challenged, and to enjoy learning the new information that is relevant to their lives. The collaborative format of Part 1 also is designed to increase engagement in the activity and create opportunities for students to benefit from their classmates' strengths. From our pilot studies, we found that the teachers were able to collect useful rich evidence about students' reading abilities while listening to the peer and group discussions.

We encourage teachers to interact actively with the students as they take Part 1 and to tailor administration to students' needs. Remember, this is about gathering information that will help you provide valuable feedback to learners and plan instruction!

Beyond the scores generated from Part 1, rich information about students can be gained by observing them and asking questions as they work to complete the items. The Teacher's Version of each form contains helpful information for getting the most out of each Part 1 item, including probing questions to help understand more clearly the strategies used by learners and skills that need further instructional input, and possible areas of inquiry for your written notes and observations. The scoring and data management tool, ELFA Notebook, will include a place for you to keep track of these written notes and observations over time, allowing you to create a portfolio of observations for each student. This portfolio can be a valuable resource for multiple purposes, such as sharing concrete feedback with individual students, creating ability groups for targeted instruction, sharing information with parents on reading development, and as a general reference when planning reading instruction. As mentioned earlier, only a prototype model of ELFA Notebook has been developed. We plan to gather teachers' feedback on the design of this prototype model for future development.

Note that while collaboration is strongly encouraged in Part 1, individual students are still responsible for their own work. Each student will record responses to the questions on his or her own assessment form. In some cases pairs will write down the same answers word-for-word, and in other instances they may agree to disagree on an answer. Students can and should ask each other clarifying questions, negotiate, and come up with strategies and guesses together. While students should use their own knowledge as their main resource for answering the questions, teachers can be a resource to them as well by clarifying the directions, modeling reading strategy use for pairs who are stuck, or even engaging in on-the-spot instructional interventions as needed to help pairs move forward. This is a dynamic time in which there will be many teachable moments and pieces of evidence that fill in the picture of students' reading needs.

We also have designed Part 1 to make the learning goals of the ELFA assessments as transparent as possible. This is accomplished by including the names of reading skills and strategies on the assessment form, prompting students to use them in the directions, and including tips in the Teacher's Versions on how to introduce and model reading strategies for learners. This approach is intended to foster greater metacognitive awareness on the part of EL readers. Teachers can greatly enhance this process by drawing attention to these skills and strategies during ELFA administration and by reviewing them in lessons.

Part 2

Part 2 of the assessment complements Part 1 by providing a quick check of students' comprehension of the same reading passage as Part 1. In Part 2, students respond to multiple-choice questions by themselves, without help from their peers or from the teacher except to clarify instructions. The questions reflect the same reading skills covered in Part 1, with special emphasis on delving into general understanding and extracting detailed content information.

Part 2 is shorter in length than Part 1, and should take much less time for students to complete. Unlike Part 1, Part 2 does not describe and give examples of strategies that learners can use to find the answers to questions. This design is related to the purpose of Part 2: to get a realistic snapshot of what individual learners can comprehend without help at a specific point in time. After all, the end goal of all the reading instruction and assessment we do is to empower independent readers. Therefore, keeping track of progress towards this goal is a critical component of classroom assessment.

One type of information rarely tells the whole story of a student's reading growth. Part 1 and Part 2 are designed to provide students with multiple opportunities to show what they know through different kinds of tasks. This means that teachers have multiple sources of evidence to draw upon to formulate hypotheses about their students' instructional needs, plan new interventions, and offer descriptive feedback.

ELFA Teacher's Versions

Another resource for teachers in the ELFA package is the Teacher's Version of the ELFA forms. The Teacher's Version of the forms is an enhanced version of the Part I items and activities provided to students. It offers guidance on how to interpret students' responses and how to ask probing questions to elicit students' learning evidence in order to inform instructional planning on the targeted areas. The Teacher's Versions take both a general and more detailed approach to instruction for the items in each form. That is to say, there are more general question probes to help elicit the main ideas and arguments of the text, to help prepare students to discuss particular topics, and to learn their strategies and reasoning behind answering questions.

In the Teacher's Versions, there are also guided questions, or drill-down questions, for each item type for each form. These questions contain more focused probes designed to check students' comprehension at various levels including word, sentence, text, and discourse level (e.g., checking understanding of vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, overall argument structure).

The following vignette in Figure 2 was developed by CRESST to demonstrate how a teacher would interact with a student during Part 1, using the questions in the Teacher's Version. This vignette uses the ELFA assessment form *The Problem with Bottled Water*.

Figure 2. A lesson vignette for using the Teacher’s Version of ELFA forms.

The teacher notices that a pair of students circled the incorrect answer for Item 1 (instead of answer C, the students chose answer B, “People need to learn more about recycling plastic.”).

Teacher: [Before asking about the main argument, the teacher first wants to check whether the student knows what the main idea of the passage is.] What is the main idea of the passage?

Student: Bottled water, er, like, makes the environment bad.

Teacher: And how do you know that? What in the text tells you about that?

Student: [The student points to the first sentence in paragraph 1] A lot of people drink bottled water. [Then he points to third sentence] So that means like that there are like problems with dumps in the ocean and stuff.

Teacher: [Teacher makes a decision that the student has a clear enough sense of what the main idea is and understands where in the text to find clues to where the main idea is, and so she decides to move next to focusing on the main argument]. So now that you’ve got the main idea, what do you think the main argument is?

Student: Because the article is about water bottles in garbage dumps. See, there’s a picture [student points to the picture].

Teacher: Yes, you showed that the picture has lots of bottles. So let’s think about the text. Let’s think about how you can decide how the author is communicating his argument.

Student: Well, in paragraph 2 it says that plastic bottles are like bad for the environment. And in paragraph 7, it says “It’s time for major changes” and that plastic bottles need to be recycled more and if they’re not recycled more, they end up in garbage dumps.

Teacher: That’s an important point that the article makes, but remember when we talked about how the author conveys his argument, what the author does in his writing to help the reader understand what the main argument is? Can you remember what we talked about?

Student: We have to look at the paragraphs?

Teacher: Yes, you look at the paragraphs to find the clues. Now, one of the ways the author conveys his main argument is in the words he chooses to communicate his opinion. So I’m going to ask you and your partner to look at the text and highlight any words that you think have to do with the author’s opinion. I’m going to leave you to think about that and I’ll check in with you in a few minutes to see the words that you’ve chosen.

Teacher thinks: I’ve linked the students back to previous learning on opinion words. When I go back to them, I want to make sure they underline “major,” “important,” “simply unaware,” “unfortunately,” “obvious,” and “clearly” so that I can help them think about the fact that they have to get the recycling, but there are other opinions beyond that ... how all these words help the author communicate his full argument. I really need to get them focused on the opinion words in the last two paragraphs. Another note to self: I’ve already seen another pair having these issues; if I see many more struggling with this, I may need to have a mini-lesson with main argument and looking for clues through opinion words and stages of the argument tomorrow. I may need to repeat the graphic in Part I of “Protecting a Strong Animal” to remind them of the stages of argument.

A glossary for reading and linguistic terms used in the Teacher’s Versions is included in the Appendices (see Appendix A for reading terms and Appendix B for linguistic terms). The purpose of these glossaries is to provide teachers with an explanation of how to discuss with students any key terminology that may assist in the development of their reading skills. A set of formative techniques to consider is also provided in Appendix C. Practical suggestions on teaching activities and examples of how to use these techniques formatively complement the ELFA forms and specific items.

Section 4: Frequently Asked Questions

What does feedback look like in a formative assessment?

As mentioned earlier, a major goal of formative assessment is providing descriptive feedback to learners. Descriptive feedback is detailed information on what a student does well and what a student needs to practice, and why. No assessment provides ready-made descriptive feedback. Rather, assessments provide data in the form of students' answers to questions and your own recorded observations. Teachers should analyze these data with the help of the data management tool, draw conclusions from them, and then share those conclusions with learners in a way that is meaningful, actionable, and digestible for them. In the future, the ELFA Notebook program will be designed to generate individualized student feedback forms.

Descriptive feedback allows teachers to put the ball back in the students' court, but teachers also need to set aside time for students to read, respond to, and act on feedback. A crucial element of feedback is that it should force the student to engage cognitively in the work. It should link to classroom learning and give specific input on steps to take to move forward in the learning progression. The bottom line is that feedback that simply tells a learner what is incorrect and does not give advice on where to go or what to do does little to empower learners.

How do I introduce the ELFA forms to my students?

Below is a scripted example of an introduction to the ELFA forms. The important thing is to make sure students know what the ELFA assessments are, what their purpose is, and how to gain the maximum benefit from them.

Today we are going to begin working on some activities to help you improve your reading and English-language skills. You are not going to get a grade on these activities. The point is to learn about your own reading abilities so that you can become a stronger and stronger reader.

In these activities, you will read and answer questions. Today you will work with a partner to answer the questions, and later this week you will work by yourself. The questions will help us practice reading skills and strategies. Reading skills are things you do when you read, like get the main idea or understand vocabulary. Strategies are suggestions for learners to use to understand.

I will be here to answer your questions about the directions and make sure you know what to do. I'll be listening to your conversations, and I might ask you some questions to keep you on the right track. We will be doing reading activities like these each week, and this is the first one.

Make sure you ask me if you are unsure of what to do at any time in the activities. These activities were designed by researchers, and I think that they will help you grow as readers and help me find new ways to teach you. I think you will enjoy these activities. The topics of the readings are interesting, and you get to share your opinion. These activities should help you to improve your reading skills and gain confidence in your English abilities!

Can I add or skip items from the forms?

Absolutely! **Part 1** of each ELFA form is adaptable. Teachers might decide that certain items are not useful for particular learners and skip them in order to spend more time on items that address skills students need to improve. Teachers might also decide to spend more than one class period on Part 1, or to devise their own extension activities. The forms lend themselves well to debate activities, as students must form their own opinions on each

reading. Teachers should feel free to manage classroom time individually, but keep in mind the importance of **systematic** data collection to formative assessment. If Part 1 is administered in a different fashion each time or items are skipped on a regular basis, teachers may be unable to answer questions that arise later based on the assessment data collected.

For Part 2, the administration is less flexible. Given the already short duration of Part 2, we suggest that you not skip items. Of course, you can always use the ELFA reading passages to design your own tasks and record the outcomes and observations in your own way.

Are there grades?

We do not recommend using the ELFA assessments as a means of assigning grades. The main reason we feel this way is that students should feel free to make mistakes and take risks on the ELFA assessments. This is part of the open learning environment that we hope to encourage.

The more important point is that you record the students' performance at the item level and make notes of students' discussion during the assessment. Then, you will need to interpret the students' performance and notes for the items and tasks to provide descriptive feedback.

Does the ELFA have lower- or higher-level forms?

Our focus in developing the ELFA forms has been on meeting the needs of intermediate and advanced learners. This arose from practical constraints. At this time, our team has not yet developed ELFA forms for learners with very low English proficiency, and we have focused our efforts on assessing the skills that are critical for learners who are under intense pressure to become independent readers of academic text as they approach the transition to all-English instruction. However, in the future, work might begin to expand the continuum to reach the developmental needs of those learners who are gaining foundational skills, and also extend into the mainstream classroom where levels and skills are mixed.

How can ELFA help me bring successful formative assessment to my classroom?

Achieving successful formative assessment depends on the expertise and effort that teachers bring to collecting, analyzing, and drawing conclusions from learning evidence. ELFA provides tools to gather and analyze learning evidence and to apply it to instruction. Evidence gathering is accomplished with the ELFA reading assessment forms themselves. Since the items are related to specific reading skills, student responses can be examined to draw conclusions about what may be hindering reading growth. An equally important source of learning evidence is teacher observation, which is facilitated with suggestions for making observations in the Teacher's Version of each assessment, and with the capability to record both assessment scores and observational evidence in the ELFA Notebook data management tool. ELFA Notebook also includes the ability to generate reports on specific skill areas, with graphs and tables indicating strength and weakness at the individual and group level. Through analysis of the ELFA Notebook reports, your own observations, and with the guidance provided in this document and the ELFA Teacher's Versions, you will have multiple resources with which to draw conclusions about what stands between your learners and their reading goals and what reading activities need to be practiced and discussed in your instruction to move learning forward.

References

- Brookhart, S. (2008). *How to give effective feedback to your students*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Butler, R. (1987). Task-involving and ego-involving properties of evaluation: Effects of different feedback conditions on motivational perceptions, interest, and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 79*, 474–482.
- Butler, R. (1988). Enhancing and undermining intrinsic motivation: The effects of task-involving and ego-involving evaluation on interest and performance. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 58*, 1–14.
- Durán, R. P. (2008). Assessing English-language learners' achievement. *Review of Research in Education, 32*(1), 292–327.
- Greenfield, J. (2004). Readability formulas for EFL. *JALT Journal, 26*, 5–24.
- Heritage, M. (2010, September). *Formative assessment and next-generation assessment systems: Are we losing an opportunity?* Washington, DC: Chief Council of State School Officers.
- Heritage, M., Kim, J., Vendlinski, T., & Herman, J. (2009). From evidence to action: A seamless process in formative assessment? *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice, 28*(3), 24–31.
- Kluger, A. N., & DeNisi, A. (1996). The effects of feedback interventions on performance: A historical review, a meta-analysis, and a preliminary feedback intervention theory. *Psychological Bulletin, 119*(2), 254–284.
- Passel, J. S., & Cohn, D. (2008). *U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from the Pew Research Center website: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/85.pdf>
- Sadler, D. R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional strategies. *Instructional Science, 18*, 119–144.
- Sheehan, K. M., Kostin, I., Futagi, Y., & Flor, M. (2010). *Generating automated text complexity classifications that are aligned with targeted text complexity standards* (ETS Research Report No. RR-10-2). Princeton, NJ: ETS.
- Wylie, E. C., Lyon, C. J., & Goe, L. (2009). *Teacher professional development focused on formative assessment: Changing teachers, changing schools* (ETS Research Report No. RR-09-10). Princeton, NJ: ETS.

Appendix A: Glossary for Reading Terms in the Teacher's Versions

The following document offers definitions and suggested ways to discuss key terms that appear in ELFA activities and items. These are offered to aid you in incorporating ELFA into your teaching practice and to ensure that English learners understand key terms and ideas essential to developing reading skills.

Context (and context clues) refers to the setting or circumstances that help to define an idea, sentence, or event and enable the meaning to be completely understood. When students can understand the context of a sentence or idea, they can know the meaning of its intended use and better understand the vocabulary, specific details, or main idea. For example, understanding the context might be useful for students to define unknown vocabulary or a vocabulary item with multiple definitions. They can use **context clues** such as the main idea of a sentence or paragraph, or surrounding vocabulary words, to help understand the meaning. To elicit the context from students, you might ask, "What is this sentence/paragraph discussing?" or "What is the main topic of this text and how does it help you to understand this word?"

Contrastive logic is the understanding drawn from language that shows opposition or contrast, such as *but*, *however*, *although*, *despite/in spite of*, and *on the other hand*.

Infer versus imply: Implying requires understanding the meaning or drawing a conclusion based on the evidence given without it being clearly stated. Implying is strongly suggesting a meaning or idea without stating it clearly. For example, a writer might imply an opinion or argument (without saying it exactly) and it is up to the reader to **infer** the meaning based on the reasoning or evidence provided. You can guide students to draw conclusions based on the evidence provided by asking questions such as, "Based on the writer's opinion here, how do you think they would feel about this?" (What does the author imply? What can you infer?) or "What do you think this sentence/example tells us about the writer's argument?" (What can you infer?)

Inferences refer to the conclusions that can be drawn based on meaning and reasons provided within the text. Students can make inferences when they try to determine how the author might feel or the author's potential argument based on the evidence, facts and/or opinions he or she provides. To guide students to correctly make inferences, you might ask, "Based on this sentence/paragraph/opinion/reasoning, what do you think the author's argument might be about this point?"

Knowledge of language includes the students' ability to recognize and use key language concepts to understand what they read, such as vocabulary and phrases (word-level knowledge of language) or literal and inferred meaning; how formal a piece of writing is (register); and so forth (sentence-level knowledge of language). Focusing on specific elements of language can help students uncover clues about the meaning in a text. To elicit this from students, you might ask questions about how words or specific sentences give clues to what a text is about.

Main argument, for the persuasive genre, is the opinion of the author in the passage or text. This could also be called the author's "point of view." To elicit this from students, you may ask, "What is the author's primary goal or claim in the text? What is the author trying to convince readers to believe?" For clues, you might have students search for opinion words or elements of a text that may be debated.

Main idea is the key concept presented in the passage. To elicit this from students, you may ask, "What is the most important piece of information or idea in this passage?" For clues, you might have students look for the topic sentence in the first paragraph.

Main reason refers to the author’s purpose in writing the text, and may indicate why the author wrote the text (e.g., to persuade, to inform, to discuss different points of view). To elicit the main reason of a text, you might ask students, “Why did the author write this passage?” or “What is the author trying to tell the reader?” Clues can be found within the thesis statement, argument structure, and key sentences throughout the text.

Paraphrase means to rewrite a phrase, sentence, or idea in your own words. Paraphrasing techniques may include a combination of strategies, such as substituting vocabulary, changing sentence structure, and modifying parts of speech. To assist students with paraphrasing, they might brainstorm synonyms and try to explain the main idea of a sentence only using these new words.

Sequencing of ideas refers to the order in which ideas and/or sentences are arranged and presented within the text. This may be important in understanding the chronological importance of events or comprehending specific details. To elicit this from students, you might have them refer to sequencing words such as *first*, *second*, *next*, *last*, *later*, and *finally*.

Text structure is the organization of the text or passage. Recognizing the organization, or text structure, of a passage can help students understand and locate the main idea, details, and so forth. To elicit the students’ understanding about the organization of the text, you might ask students where the author’s main argument is and where its supporting evidence is described.

Thesis statement is a key sentence within a text that provides a summary of the author’s overall opinion or argument. It also may indicate the structure of a passage (i.e., a brief outline). It can usually be found at the end of the first paragraph of a text and is a strong indicator of the author’s purpose in writing. Students could be asked to identify the thesis statement in a paragraph and determine the author’s main idea/argument based on this sentence. The message of the thesis statement often is reiterated in the final paragraph, which could be a useful clue in checking student understanding.

Topic is the general theme or subject of the passage. To elicit the topic of a text, you might ask students, “What is the topic/subject of this passage?” For clues, you may have them refer to the title, key sentences, or images.

Transitional expressions or transitions are words or phrases an author uses to connect ideas from one sentence or paragraph to another. Transitions are used by authors to help the reader progress from one significant idea to the next. Different transitions do many different things. Some may add reasons, causes, or support for an argument (e.g., *in addition*, *indeed*, *moreover*, *furthermore*, *further*, *not only*) or present other viewpoints (e.g., *on the other hand*, *however*, *in contrast*, *whereas*, *but*). Others may indicate cause and effect (e.g., *as a result*, *as a consequence*, *because of this/that*, *for this reason*) or sequence (e.g., *previously*, *consequently*, *initially*, *first/second/third*, *next*). These terms may appear in both sentence-level and discourse-level considerations and are useful tools to check students’ understanding of sequencing of ideas, argument structure, and comparisons between two texts. You might ask students, “What do these words indicate about the structure/sequence of events?” or “What does this phrase tell us about the purpose of this sentence/paragraph in the writer’s argument?”

Appendix B: Glossary for Linguistic Terms in the Teacher's Versions

The following document offers definitions of major linguistic terms that appear in ELFA activities and items. These are offered to aid incorporating ELFA into your teaching practice and to ensure that ELs understand the important role of grammatical structures and their use in developing reading skills.

Attributive verbs are verbs that modify a noun similar to attributive adjectives and are usually in the form of a participle or infinitive (e.g., the man *watching* the TV; a *driving* lesson). These verbs also may be used to show that you are referring to or citing someone else, such as *says, admits, claims, denies, agrees, supports*, and so forth, or they may show an attribute of a word, such as *are* designed. This may be useful when considering word-level comprehension and could assist students in understanding unfamiliar vocabulary, eliciting context clues from grammar, and eliminating answer choices. These verbs also can aid students in identifying parts of speech and deducing meaning from context. Try to draw students' attention to the links between attributive verbs and the words to which they connect in order to facilitate word- and sentence-level understanding.

Evaluative adjective/phrase describes a noun similarly to an adjective, but also provides some sense of judgment, either positive or negative. For example, "The *fantastic* game" or "the *unhealthy* dinner" are both descriptive phrases that indicate a positive or negative connotation. To elicit understanding from students, you might ask, "What does this adjective/phrase tell us about the writer's opinion?" or "Do you think the writer's opinion is positive or negative based on this adjective/phrase?"

Modals or modal verbs may also be called "helping verbs" and are usually used in two- or three-word verb phrases such as "might be going" or "should go." The modals include words like *must, shall, will, should, could, would, might, may, can*, and so forth.

Prepositional phrase includes a **preposition** and a **noun** (its object) that shows how the noun/object is related to another word in the sentence. Examples of prepositions include *about, after, at, between, by, despite, from, in, into, over, until, up, with, and without*.

Relative clause modifies a noun/noun phrase and is introduced by either a relative pronoun (e.g., *which, that, who, whom, or whose*) or a relative adverb (*where, when, or why*). For instance: "The student *who took the test*" or "The math lesson *where we learned fractions*."

Appendix C: ELFA Formative Techniques Glossary

The following is a short list of useful techniques that become formative when they are used to gather evidence for making inferences about student thinking and, in turn, are used to inform instruction. For each technique listed, the chart indicates the formative assessment principle the technique mobilizes and then provides a definition. Each of these techniques has the potential to create formative opportunities in the classroom. We encourage the use of these techniques as a part of the ELFA integration. These techniques were adapted from the Keeping Learning on Track initiative developed at ETS to support professional development and assist educators in integrating formative techniques into their teaching practice.

Formative Assessment Technique	Guiding Principle Technique Mobilizes	Definition
Collaborative Learning: Jigsaw	Questioning	The teacher divides a task among groups such that each group is responsible for one part of a larger task. The groups then recombine to pool their knowledge and complete a larger task.
Group Share	Questioning	A reporting option, used during or after collaborative work, that allows groups to share their thinking, progress, or projects with the rest of the class. To be of the most benefit, all group members must help to make the report.
Keep the Question Going	Questioning	The teacher asks a question and, after selecting a student to answer, asks another student if he or she agrees (or if he or she can add to the answer). The teacher keeps asking students until a complete picture emerges and student thinking deepens.
Key Word Poster	Questioning	Key word posters capture students' growing understanding of new vocabulary and encourage the use of that vocabulary during instruction. The words, terms, or phrases on the poster help students discuss and think about their learning.
Learning Targets	Learning Targets	The process of consciously sharing learning targets with students at the start of each lesson.
Popsicle® Sticks or Paper Strips	Questioning	The teacher places students' names on Popsicle sticks or paper strips and, after asking a question, uses these to randomly select students to answer. The goal is to engage all students in thinking about the question and to engage more students in making their thinking known. This can be used to check individual understanding in a group setting.
Review Posters	Learning Targets; Self-Assessment and Reflection	Review posters provide a way of charting what students have learned; they permit the teacher to organize the information as students provide it, so that students may reflect on it in a new way. In addition, review posters make the information readily available to students as they continue their learning.
Self-Reflection: Traffic Lighting	Self-Assessment and Reflection	Students reflect on their understanding of specific content, then use green, yellow, or red crayons/markers, stickers, cups, or other devices to indicate that they understand, are not sure, or do not understand different aspects of the content. This can be used to aid in individualizing attention in a group setting.

Formative Assessment Technique	Guiding Principle Technique Mobilizes	Definition
Student-Developed Rubrics	Learning Targets; Self-Assessment and Reflection; Peer Assessment and Support	The whole class, guided by the teacher, collaboratively develops a rubric. This process helps students “own” the quality criteria. The teacher’s guidance keeps the criteria on track, but student-friendly language helps make the final product accessible and useful to students.
Student-Developed Tests and Questions	Questioning	Like writing frames, student-developed tests provide a framework that allows students to organize and demonstrate their understanding of content. Questions they develop indicate how they are internalizing the content and may also reveal misconceptions.
Think-Pair-Share	Questioning	The teacher asks a question, then (1) students think on their own, (2) share their ideas in pairs (perhaps receiving feedback from a partner), and (3) share their best thinking with the whole class. As a result, students’ contributions to the discussion are, ideally, more elaborated and thoughtful.
Two Stars and a Wish	Peer Assessment and Support	Two Stars and a Wish provides a specific structure peers can use to give each other feedback on their work. “Two stars” represents two positive comments, while the “wish” suggests one comment about what the student needs to do to improve the work.
Whiteboards	Questioning	A whole-class response system in which (1) the teacher asks or presents a question, (2) students write responses on their whiteboards (which may just be white cardstock inside page protectors), and (3) students simultaneously hold up their boards for the teacher to see. The teacher scans the whiteboards, then uses this information to adapt the lesson as needed.

(Adapted from *CBAL™ Glossary of Formative Assessment Techniques*, by Educational Testing Service. Copyright 2013 by Educational Testing Service.)

Copyright © 2014 by Educational Testing Service. All rights reserved. ETS, the ETS logo and LISTENING. LEARNING. LEADING. are registered trademarks of Educational Testing Service (ETS). CBAL is a trademark of ETS. All other trademarks are property of their respective owners. 25325



Listening. Learning. Leading.[®]

www.ets.org