

How to Design Your Own Language Dive

This resource is intended to provide all educators with an overview of the process of designing a Language Dive. The suggestions should be modified to meet the needs of your ELLs across K-12 in all content areas.

Users of the EL Education Language Arts Curriculum (2nd edition) should read the Supporting English Language Learners guidance, the Language Dive overview in the Module 1 Appendix of the Teacher Guide, and practice implementing the curriculum Language Dives before using this document.

What is a Language Dive?

A Language Dive¹ empowers students to analyze, understand, and use the language of academic sentences, which often seems opaque to students. During the daily Language Dive, the teacher and students slow down for 10-20 minutes to have a conversation about the meaning, purpose, and structure of a compelling sentence from a complex text, or from a learning target, checklist, or rubric included in the curriculum. Following the engaging deconstruct-reconstruct-practice routine of the Language Dive (see Step 5, below), students play with the smallest “chunks” of the sentence, acting them out, rearranging them, or using them to talk about their own lives. As a result of paying close attention to how language works, all students begin to acquire the necessary facility with academic English and English language learners (ELLs) strengthen their overall language ability.

What are the steps for designing my own daily Language Dive?

1. **Select a sentence** for the Language Dive based on the bulleted criteria below. Consider this sample sentence from the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 17. (Students read excerpts of the UDHR in EL Education’s ELA curriculum: Grade 5, Module 1.)

Everyone	has the right	to own property alone	as well as	in association with others.
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A Language Dive sentence should meet these criteria:

- **Come from a complex text** in ELA, Science, Math, History, and Social Studies. (In the Grade 5 sample, the sentence is from a complex social studies primary source, the UDHR.)
- **Be relevant to present and future content and skills** (learning targets), such as the guiding question of an expedition, case study, or unit, the main idea of a text, speaking and writing tasks, or the CCSS—or all of these. (For instance, in the sample, the sentence helps students answer the guiding question of the entire 8-week module: “What are human rights, and how can they be threatened?”)
- **Contain language functions (or purposes for using language) that relate to the content and tasks at hand.** (In the sample, one language function is asserting a right. Students must assert a human right as part of the Module 1 performance task.)

¹ The EL Education Language Dive is based on “Juicy Sentences”: Wong Fillmore, L., & Fillmore, C. (2012, January) “What does text complexity mean for English learners and language minority students?” Paper presented at the Understanding Language Conference, Stanford, CA.

- **Contain complex language structures.** (In the sample, complex structures include *as well as* and *in association with*. The sentence also features ellipsis, where after *as well as*, the authors intentionally omitted the structure *to own property* because readers don't need the structure to understand the author is still talking about owning property: *Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as ~~to own property~~ in association with others.*)
- **Contain academic vocabulary or figurative language.** (In the sample, academic vocabulary includes *association*.)

2. Chunk the sentence:

- Break the sentence into smaller, meaningful structures (e.g., phrases or clauses) as in the sample.

3. Refine the learning targets, focus structure, and rationale:

- Focus on the meaning and purpose of a particularly compelling structure in one chunk of the sentence (although students should at least briefly discuss the meaning of all of the chunks). In the sample, students might focus on one or all of the following structures, depending upon student need, learning targets, and time:
 - *as well as* may be useful to discuss for students struggling with linking language that connects and emphasizes related ideas (*to own property alone* and *with others*);
 - *in association with* may be helpful for discussing academic vocabulary and compelling prepositional phrases that signal the relationships between words (*alone* and *others*);
 - *to own property* may help clarify how to use infinitive phrases to express a belief.
- Clarify how the sentence helps meet the learning targets (e.g., the CCSS and state English language development standards. Example learning targets that focus on meaning, purpose, and structure:
 - I can determine the main ideas of an article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (RI.5.2)
 - I can understand and practice using the conjunction *as well as* to connect phrases or clauses in a sentence. (RI.5.4, L.5.1a, California ELD 5.II.C.6)
- Think through the rationale for discussing the meaning, purpose, and structure of the sentence. Example:
 - This sentence is compelling because it uses complex conjunctions and prepositional phrases to help address the learning targets, and connects to the guiding question by helping to explain what human rights are. Students will discuss in detail the focus structure *as well as*. Students will use the focus structure to practice stating and writing their own rights. Students will apply their understanding of the meaning and structure of this sentence when discussing and writing about threats to human rights in *Esperanza Rising*.

4. Determine timing:

- Plan to spend at least 10-20 minutes daily deconstructing, reconstructing, and practicing a sentence.
- Spread the deconstruct-reconstruct-practice routine across several days, 10-20 minutes per day, if the sentence is particularly complex, or depending on student need. For example:
 - Deconstruct the sentence on Day 1; review and then reconstruct the sentence on Day 2; review and practice the structures on Day 3.

5. Follow the deconstruct-reconstruct-practice process, considering how to invite conversation among students to address the learning targets.

Note that understanding grammar and using grammar terminology, (e.g., subject, predicate, prepositional phrase) can enhance the conversation by giving students additional tools to analyze language. In particular, strive to use grammar terminology when addressing CCSS Language standards or state ELD standards. (A helpful resource is the *Longman Student Grammar of Spoken and Written English*.) In the end, however, don't be held back by grammar; it is most important that teachers and students adapt an inquiry-based discussion about the meaning and purpose of the sentence and chunks.

Possibilities:

- **Deconstruct**

- Discuss the meaning and purpose of the sentence and each chunk in small groups, sharing out whole-class. Use the [Questions We Can Ask during a Language Dive anchor chart](#) if needed to prompt conversation. In the Grade 5 sample:
 - “What’s another way to say *alone*?”
 - “Can you figure out why the authors wrote *in association with*?” “What if we remove the chunk *as well as*?”

- **Reconstruct**

- As a class, circle back to the meaning and purpose of the entire sentence. Examples: “Now what do you think is the meaning of the sentence?” “What is another way to say this sentence?”
- Discuss how the sentence relates to the guiding question, main idea, tasks, and learning targets. Example: “How does this Language Dive add to your understanding of what human rights are?”
- Students can use the Questions We Can Ask during a Language Dive anchor chart to prompt additional questions. In the Grade 5 sample:
 - “What if we replace *as well as* with *as opposed to*? How does that change the meaning?”
 - “Can we say this sentence in a different order? How?”
 - “How can we use *as well as* in our speaking and writing?”

- **Practice**

- Apply the focus structure and the sentence through speaking and in writing, in pairs and individually, sharing out whole-class.
- Students can create and complete sentence frames. In the sample: *Everyone has the right to _____ as well as _____.*
- Students can compare and contrast the Language Dive focus and sentence structures with other structures in the text, and describe to a partner how the structures are similar and different.
- Students can post the chunks to a [Language Chunk Wall](#), an wall in the classroom organized by language category and displayed throughout the module. Students can refer to the Wall during future speaking and writing tasks. In the sample, one possible category is “Language to connect words, phrases, clauses,” where students could post and refer back to *as well as*.
- Students can ask themselves questions. In the Grade 5 sample:
 - “What if we remove the chunk *as well as*? Does the sentence still make sense? Why do we think that?”
 - “What if we replace *as well as* with *as opposed to*? How does that change the meaning?”
 - “Can we say this sentence in a different order? How?”

- “How can we use *as well as* in our speaking and writing?”

Sketching, movement, and manipulatives may be effective in all phases of deconstruct-reconstruct- practice. In the sample:

- Students can deconstruct meaning by sketching or acting out the difference between owning property alone and with others.
- Students can reconstruct meaning by each taking one chunk from a scrambled pile of chunks and displaying it in front of the class, thinking aloud to rearrange themselves and then reread the sentence.
- Students can practice structure by rearranging the chunks to say and write the sentence in a different order: *Everyone has the right to own property in association with others as well as alone.*
- Students can practice structure by posting the chunks to a Language Chunk Wall, an anchor chart organized by language category and displayed in the classroom throughout the module. Students can refer to the Wall during future speaking and writing tasks. In the sample, one possible category is “Language to connect words, phrases, clauses,” where students could post and refer back to *as well as*.