

Programming Information  
**Encouraging the Use of Home Languages**



This resource can be accessed online at:

[http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/eslapb/encouraging\\_use\\_of\\_home\\_languages.html](http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/eslapb/encouraging_use_of_home_languages.html)

## About this Resource

A home language is the dominant language that a student uses to communicate in the home. Many English language learners have more than one home language.

Maintaining and encouraging the further development of home language proficiency can benefit students in many ways—personally, socially, and academically. Therefore, schools should encourage English language learners to use their home language both at home and in the classroom.

Encouraging English language learners to use their home language supports their learning by allowing them to access the language in which they think. It also allows them to transfer language skills developed in their home language to the learning of English, which in turn helps them understand curricular concepts they are learning in English.

## Why Encourage the Use of Home Languages?

The home language of English language learners does not hinder their ability to learn English. The home language can be a valuable learning resource. The use of a home language—at home and at school—can improve students’ English language proficiency, academic performance, and social development.

### The Use and Development of the Home Language

The use and further development of the home language can allow English language learners to

- **access a wide range of language skills and knowledge that can be applied to their developing English language skills.** English language learners process new language skills and knowledge alongside their existing home language skills and knowledge. When English language learners listen, speak, read, and write, the same part of the brain is involved regardless of whether the home language or English is being used.

The knowledge students have gained about how language works, which they developed during the learning of their home language, can be applied to learning English and can enhance their English language development. English language learners build on the language foundation that already exists, and they can make connections between literacy skills in their home language and English.

- **understand subject-matter content that they have difficulty understanding in English.** Students’ English language proficiency must be sufficiently developed to allow them to process the academic demands of the classroom. However, many English language learners have significant gaps in their understanding of English.

If English language learners are permitted and encouraged to use their home language in the classroom, they are better equipped to understand and process complex information and communicate their understandings.

For example, when English language learners are engaged in reading and writing activities, they often need to stop and think in their home language in order to process information, make connections, and construct meaning. They may even want to write some notes, explanations of concepts, and definitions of English words in their home language as a way to record information more efficiently and to process what they are learning.

Using home language for certain information-processing tasks will not impede their English language development; instead, it will help them learn and feel more in control of their learning. As they gain academic English language proficiency, they will rely less on their home language to learn content, but they will continue to use their home language knowledge to learn English. (See [Understanding the Acquisition of English as an Additional Language](#).)

- **foster a strong identity as an individual, a family member, and a community member.** Proficiency in a home language allows students to communicate with family members, peers, and community members who do not speak English. This can foster stronger relationships within the family and community and promote a greater understanding of both family and cultural values.

Valuing a student's home language at school and at home can help the student develop a positive self-concept and pride in background and culture.

- **expand their understanding of the world and interactions with others.** Continued literacy development in the home language(s) provides opportunities for English language learners to become bilingual or **plurilingual**. This will help students participate in a global society and expand their career and employment opportunities. Understanding a language other than English can also encourage greater appreciation for other people, different cultures, and global issues.
- **develop skills that transfer to their overall academic growth.** Competencies and strategies developed when learning a language can also be applied to help learn content in any subject area. Students who develop proficiency in more than one language often become more successful learners.

**plurilingual:** able to understand and be understood in at least three languages and being able to switch from one language to another according to the circumstances

## How Teachers Can Support the Use of Home Languages

By providing students with opportunities to access their home language, teachers can help them use their skills, prior knowledge, and experience to enhance their English language development and understanding of concepts.

### Bridging Home Language Literacy and English Literacy

All students come to school with literacy experiences. Home language literacy and texts (including books, music, photos, drawings, artifacts, games, and oral storytelling) can be used in the classroom to help bridge students' home language and English language literacies.

Recognizing the home language literacy of English language learners values the language learning that students do outside the school setting, acknowledges their families' contributions to their literacy, and activates their prior knowledge.

Recognizing the home language literacy of English language learners can also give teachers background knowledge for designing literacy activities to which students with different life experiences and cultural backgrounds can relate.

### Examples and Ideas

Home Literacy Inventory	Not all English language learners have the opportunity to maintain their home language. Ask English language learners whether they maintain their home language literacy in their home and in the community. For those who do, find out how they maintain their home language. Also, have students bring to class some of the texts they have read, listened to, viewed, or engaged with recently in any other way in their home language.
Explore Language Learning Opportunities	Acknowledge that teaching and learning take place in many contexts; e.g., home, cultural centre, place of worship, playground. Find opportunities to connect school projects and assignments with extra-curricular activities that involve the use of the home language.
Popular Culture	Encourage students to access popular culture in their home language. For example, have students make a recording of them singing their favourite home language folk or pop songs or create drawings based on favourite television shows or films they have viewed in their home language.
Oral Literacy	Have students record and share oral texts in their home language; e.g., songs, stories, and interviews. Use short audio or video clips as prompts for literacy activities in the classroom.

Multilingual Literacy Centres      Establish a multilingual literacy centre in the school or classroom where students and their families/caregivers can share books, music, or movies in their home language.

### Considerations

Students will have a range of home language literacy experiences. The appropriateness of **bridging strategies** will need to be considered on an individual basis. Some home language texts may be considered sacred or private, and there may be certain considerations that need to be observed regarding their use in the classroom.

**bridging strategy:** a strategy for establishing a link between students' prior knowledge and new ideas

## Engaging Parents/Caregivers in Home Language Development

Parents/caregivers can help to develop students' home language literacy by using their language routinely at home and creating opportunities for their child to hear, read, and use the home language in the community.

It is important to reassure parents/caregivers that the use of the home language does not inhibit the students' English language development. In fact, strong home language literacy helps English language learners develop as English speakers and learners. For more information on ways parents/caregivers can support students' language development, see the parent tip sheet [Learning English as a New Language](#).

## Examples and Ideas

### In the School

Classroom Helpers and Special Guests

Parents/caregivers of English language learners may not be aware that they are encouraged by Alberta schools to be involved in school activities. At the beginning of the year, provide parents/caregivers with a list of activities and days when they could, if their schedules permit, help in the classroom or provide supervision (e.g., recess or lunch supervisors). Invite parents/caregivers into the classroom to

- share their language, culture, and customs for celebrations and cultural events
- present perspectives on topics being discussed in the classroom (e.g., literature, music, world history, contemporary issues)
- speak to students about their homeland and what it was like coming to a new country
- share information about their heritage or family history
- help students create [dual-language books](#)

School-Home Communication	Develop a log that provides parents/caregivers with a weekly schedule of what students are doing in class, a schedule of field trips and class events, and ideas on how they can support their child in the home language.
Special Events	The school can sponsor an international family festival, providing a venue for members of the community to share their cultures. Encourage parents/caregivers of English language learners to attend the event and share their language and culture with students.
Language Support Volunteers	Invite parents/caregivers to translate key school documents. They may also volunteer to help other parents/caregivers understand information that was shared in English.
Parent/Caregiver Workshops	Host workshops for parents/caregivers to learn how they can support their child's language and academic development.

### **Outside the School**

Providing and Sharing Texts	Encourage parents/caregivers to read with their child. They can read stories, instructional texts, letters, and emails in the home language, as well as <a href="#">dual-language books</a> written in the home language and in English.
Oral Language Development	Encourage parents/caregivers who may not be able to read or write in their home language to tell stories in their home language.
Appreciating Other Cultures	Encourage parents/caregivers to share aspects of their culture by telling folktales, showing and explaining the significance of cultural artifacts, or by preparing and sharing their culinary specialties.
Team Bilingual Writing	Ask parents/caregivers to collaborate with their child in presenting a portion of a project in their home language.

### **Considerations**

Help parents/caregivers choose strategies that would support the student's learning and literacy development. In some cultures, parents/caregivers are not used to being directly involved in the formal education of their children. Therefore, it is important to let them know their involvement at school is valued and welcomed. For more information on the role parents/caregivers can have in a student's education and in the school, see the parent tip sheet [Parents' Role in Education—Be a Part of It.](#)

## Creating an Inclusive Environment

Teachers who help students take pride in their home language proficiency and help students maintain their home language, especially while acquiring academic English, create inclusive learning environments that support language proficiency development and enhance academic performance. English language learners thrive in an environment where linguistic and cultural diversity is celebrated. Encouraging students to explore multiple perspectives allows English language learners to contribute insights and knowledge that reflect and are shaped by their culture and life experiences. Encouraging and providing opportunities for students to express themselves in their home language and share their linguistic and cultural knowledge with peers helps to create an engaging and inclusive classroom.

## Encouraging Positive Home Language Transfer

All languages have underlying rules that make meaningful communication possible. Cross-linguistic strategies, such as comparing one's home language and English, transfer academic understanding and strengthen the students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in both languages.

Research shows that students benefit when teachers provide opportunities to transfer **language structures** and vocabulary from their home language during the process of literacy development in English—for example, cognates (words in English and the home language that look or sound very similar and have a similar meaning). Students should be encouraged to use their home language as a resource to understand new words and concepts in English. Students often require coaching to effectively transfer ideas between their home language and English.

**language structures:** components of language that work together to create comprehensible and meaningful communication

These strategies can further the student's understanding and acquisition of English and serve to maintain and improve the home language.



# Resources for Supporting the Use of Home Languages

## Audio Books

Fiction and non-fiction audio books are available in a variety of languages. They may or may not include the print version of the text that students could use to follow along as they listen. Students can listen to these audio books individually, with a peer, or with a parent/caregiver.

When audio books are paired with their corresponding print format, students can easily make connections between the words they hear and how these words appear in print. When students read along with an audio book, they hear the correct pronunciation and learn the meaning of new vocabulary in context. As well, they are more likely to begin using this new vocabulary when they speak and write in their home language.

When using audio books

- have students complete a related follow-up assignment, such as an oral or a written book report, photo montage, personal response, or a compare-and-contrast activity
- facilitate a class discussion in English about the story or subject matter described in the audio books

## Considerations

Some English language learners have had limited exposure to reading and writing in their home language. They may also have limited proficiency in reading and writing in English. Ensure that the reading level in the audio books is appropriate for the student.

## eBooks

Search the Internet for websites having digital collections of books in various languages. Some websites provide access to digital books free of charge, including books in various languages. Many school websites have lists of links to free digital collections of literature in languages other than English, including dual-language books.

## Dual-language Books

Dual-language books are written in two languages, either with English text on one page and the equivalent text in the other language on the opposite page or with text in both languages on the same page. This format makes it easy for readers to confirm understanding and compare aspects of language between both languages, such as word choice and the way thoughts are expressed.

Dual-language books are often illustrated to help convey meaning and cultural knowledge and support storytelling. Dual-language books can be either fiction or non-fiction. Examples of dual-language books can be found at [A Dual Language Book Project](#).

## Where can I access dual-language books?

Dual-language books can be accessed through publishers, websites, and libraries. They can also be authored by students, parents, or community volunteers. Some schools use their school website to publish dual-language books that their students have developed.

## Why use dual-language books?

Dual-language books can

- benefit both English language acquisition and home language maintenance/development
- develop students' ability to express their identities through two of their languages
- allow students to see themselves as competent bilinguals having the power to engage with a wider audience through their growing proficiency in two languages
- allow English language learners and their English-speaking peers to read the same story/text
- create empathy and understanding for people with different perspectives, experiences, and cultures
- allow English language learners to see their culture and worldview reflected in the literature they read
- allow English language learners to share their linguistic knowledge and culture with their teachers and classmates
- serve as a bridge between the school and the home, involving families/caregivers of English language learners in literacy development activities
- entertain and encourage reading and vocabulary development
- help develop the speaking and writing language skills of English language learners as they create or talk about dual-language books

## How do you use dual-language books?

1. Introduce the dual-language book to students.

- Show students what makes the dual-language book unique; e.g., "There are words in English on this page. On the opposite page, there are words that mean the same thing, but these words are in another language."
- Talk briefly about the story in English. Identify the main character and her or his goal or challenges. Point to pictures as you talk to assist English language learners in their understanding.
- Talk about the home language used in the book. Talk about the part(s) of the world in which that language is spoken and which student(s) in the class can speak the language.
- Tell students you will read the English parts, and a parent/caregiver or student who speaks the other language will read the other parts of the book.
- Set some reading goals with students (e.g., listening for certain actions or events or for **cognates**).

**cognates:** words in different languages sharing a common origin

A cognate may look similar to a word you already know in another language and it may have a meaning that is similar, too; e.g., *night* (English), *Nacht* (German), *nuit* (French); or *name* (English), *Name* (German), *namn* (Swedish), *nome* (Italian).

2. Read the dual-language book.

- Encourage students to either
  - read the entire book in English, followed by the home language
  - read it one page at a time, alternating between the two languages

- Pair monolingual students with a student who can speak another language for shared reading.
  - Make an audio recording of the dual-language book to support students' independent readings. A recording of the English text can assist English language learners with comprehension and English language development. A recording of the home language text provides an opportunity for English language learners to showcase and take pride in their home language. Students can help make the recordings.
3. Involve students in an activity after the reading.
- Link the activity with goals students set for the reading to assess and confirm understanding.
  - Invite students to talk about an aspect of the book (e.g., language, event, character).
  - Talk about the words. Have students define new vocabulary in their own words.
  - Use charts to record English vocabulary that would be new to most students or vocabulary that would be useful for English language learners to acquire and use.
  - Use charts to record the equivalent words in English and in the home language.
  - Add new words to word walls. Students can add words that are new to them in their [personal dictionaries](#).
4. Learn some words in another language.

Encourage English-speaking students to learn a few words and common expressions in another language that they encountered while reading and talking about the dual-language book.

Students are naturally curious about other languages. They are eager to learn a few words and common expressions in another language, especially if they can use these words and expressions with their classmates who speak the language. An audio recording of the home language text can help students who do not speak this home language learn a few words and gain an appreciation for this language.

### **How do you create dual-language books with students?**

1. Choose a topic.
  - Select topics, themes, and concepts being learned in class or other topics of interest to students. This can help students understand what is being taught and will provide practice for English language learners in using academic and subject- or discipline-specific vocabulary.
  - Depict situations and events, customs, traditions, perspectives, and ways of knowing and thinking that would be familiar to Canadian-born students and to English language learners who may have lived abroad or are part of a culturally distinct community in Canada.
  - Encourage students to translate dual-language books into additional home languages.
2. Write the dual-language books.
  - Give students the option of creating dual-language books on their own or in collaboration with other students, parents, family members, or classroom volunteers.
  - Students can choose to handwrite and illustrate their books or use a computer to write and illustrate their books.

- Investigate **ebook apps and websites** that could be used to make dual-language books.
- Encourage students to use word walls, bilingual dictionaries, and translation tools as they create their bilingual books. They should add new words they discover to their [personal dictionaries](#).
- Involve family members in creating the dual-language books through face-to-face conversations or interactions with relatives and friends through the Internet.
- Pair English language learners with native speakers of English who can help write or edit the English parts of the books.
- Have English language learners who have proficiency in their home language translate English texts into their language.

Be sure to review the Terms of Use or User Agreement to ensure students' privacy and rights as authors and text creators are safeguarded.

### 3. Publish and share the dual-language books.

- Consider laminating or binding the books to make them more durable and to give their authors a greater sense of pride.
- Make copies of the books so students have their own personal copy, and present copies as gifts to family members.
- Create a library to house and showcase the books, and make copies available to others.
- Explore digital formats that can include recordings to allow for sharing across time and distance.
- Continue to add more dual-language books to the collection year after year.

### Considerations

Teachers do not need to be speakers of the students' home languages in order to facilitate the creation or use of dual-language books in the classroom.

Collaborating on the writing, editing, and illustration of dual-language books, and talking with others about the stories or information, enhances students' literacy and communication skills. It also helps them learn more about other cultures and ways of knowing and about their own and each other's languages.

### Dictionaries, Thesauri, and Translators

Language translators and bilingual dictionaries can be accessed online or as applications for smart phones. Several online English dictionaries were developed specifically for English language learners.

Students can enhance their knowledge and vocabulary in their home language and in English through the frequent use of online bilingual dictionaries, picture dictionaries, glossaries, thesauri, and translation tools. These sites are also useful for translating language from English to the student's home language.

## Using Dictionaries, Thesauri, and Translators

- During a reading or writing activity, have students search meanings and spellings for new vocabulary and information in their home language and in English.
- Have students find out how to say a word in English, and provide examples of the word's usage.
- Have students search for grammatical information; e.g., the part of speech of a word, the plural of a noun, the past tense of a verb, or a synonym or an antonym of a word.
- Have students use translators to help them decipher challenging texts and when creating more complex academic texts.
- Encourage students to add the new vocabulary they have learned to their own [personal bilingual dictionaries](#).
- Encourage students to use the new vocabulary.

## Considerations

Learning to use a dictionary and thesaurus correctly and effectively can be a challenging skill to acquire. Many English language learners may require extra time to find a word, especially if they are unsure of the word's spelling.

Using a dictionary or translator often involves the student choosing the most appropriate word from several word choices, which can be challenging. Discourage students from relying on translators as a primary means of understanding and creating texts. Encourage students to use a variety of strategies.

It should be noted that online translation tools are not always capable of providing accurate and appropriate translations. They are most effective when used to help understand the gist of a text.

Search the Internet for online dictionaries, like WordReference.com, and translation tools, like Google Translate. Some websites allow users to translate a text using several different language translation programs. Not all languages are supported by online dictionaries and translation tools.

## Text-to-speech and Speech-to-text Technology

Text-to-speech technology converts written text to audio speech using a digitized or synthesized voice. Text-to-speech software helps English language learners read and comprehend print text. Some online translation programs and some ebook readers also have text-to-speech capability. An example of text-to-speech technology that supports multiple languages is Read and Write for Google.

Speech-to-text technology converts spoken words to print text. Speech-to-text software is available in many languages. Some speech-to-text software, like Google Cloud Speech API, supports multiple languages.

Multilingual programs using these technologies are available. Students may be able to use these technologies in their home language or in English.

### **Using Text-to-speech and Speech-to-text Software**

- Have students use text-to-speech software to help them decipher challenging English or home language texts or to help them as a proofreading tool. Hearing a text aloud can often help English language learners recognize errors they have made.
- Have students use speech-to-text software to help them identify the spelling of words that they can say in their home language or in English but not write. This can be helpful when looking up definitions in dictionaries, thesauri, and glossaries. Students may also choose to use the software when taking notes or brainstorming.

### **Considerations**

Teachers may need to provide instructional support as students use these tools to develop their understandings and language proficiency. Not all languages are supported by text-to-speech and speech-to-text technologies.

### **Media in Home Languages**

English language learners may have access to the following types of media in their home language:

- radio programs and television broadcasts
- Wikipedia articles
- magazines and newspapers
- websites

Encourage students to use resources in their home language to maintain and further develop their home language proficiency and to better understand topics and concepts they are learning at school. Encourage students to bring resources in their home language that are relevant to the topics and concepts being addressed in class.

### **Considerations**

Many topics, issues, and perspectives that are explored in Canadian classrooms are not always reflected in media developed in other languages.

Also, students' access to technology and media in their home language can vary greatly from family to family. Encouraging students to share their home language resources in class allows students with the same home language to have equal access to media available in their home language.

## Reflecting on Your Practices Regarding Home Languages

Use the “Self-reflection: Encouraging the Use of Home Languages” checklist to gauge how effectively English language learners in your classroom are currently supported in maintaining and developing their home languages. Identify areas in which supports could be enhanced.

[Self-reflection: Encouraging the Use of Home Languages](#)

## Self-reflection: Encouraging the Use of Home Languages

	Yes	No	Not Sure
I have information about each student's prior schooling and literacy in his or her home language.			
I am aware that students who access their home language while completing classroom activities and assignments learn English more easily.			
I am aware that giving English language learners the opportunity to use their home language in the classroom can build their <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-confidence</li> <li>• pride in their heritage and culture</li> <li>• English language proficiency</li> </ul>			
I communicate to students and their parents/caregivers that using their home language at home supports the <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• maintenance and continued development of their home language</li> <li>• learning of English</li> </ul>			
I create a positive and inclusive learning environment where students can feel comfortable using their home language in the classroom.			
I invite family and community members to share their heritage, life experiences, and culture by involving them in school and classroom activities.			
I am familiar with digital tools available in various languages to support English language learners.			
I provide opportunities for students to use their home language during class time, including			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• speaking with same-language peers</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accessing translation devices and dictionaries</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reading and writing dual-language books</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• working on class assignments</li> </ul>			
I use a variety of learning strategies and activities that support the use of students' home language.			
I display and share evidence of work completed in home languages in the classroom and school.			
<i>Notes:</i>			



## My Personal Dictionary

New word, expression, or phrase:
What it means in English:
What it means in my home language:
Used in a sentence:
A picture to help me remember what it means:
My strategy to help me <input type="checkbox"/> remember it <input type="checkbox"/> spell it <input type="checkbox"/> say it or <input type="checkbox"/> use it:

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New word, expression, or phrase:

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