

Standards in Action: Context-Driven Language Practice



Introduction

The WIDA ACCESS test assesses the English language across content areas and proficiency levels. While language development is best practiced during authentic learning tasks, the ACCESS training materials offer additional reading, speaking, writing, and listening tasks to use as practice. These prompts can elicit language across content areas and familiarize students with the ACCESS assessment.

No matter the content area and grade level, when apprenticing students to specific genres of language, it is important to provide mentor texts that model the language choices a person can make as they express themselves for specific purposes. Analyzing a mentor text for language features that can be adopted or adapted into students' language practices builds deeper pockets of language features that students can choose from as they express their knowledge, opinions, and beliefs. To continue guiding students toward the next proficiency levels, practice can be followed up with focused, detailed feedback that will inform and encourage students' language development.

Amplifying Family Voice in Action



Teacher: Jess Pulzetti

Context: Middle school multilingual learner teacher in Massachusetts

Jess's Practice

Jess noticed that her students were not performing as strongly on the WIDA ACCESS writing tasks as she had hoped. In the context of classroom activities, the students seemed to utilize more of their linguistic resources than what she saw in their assessment scores. This motivated her to engage in more language activities that would also build familiarity with the WIDA ACCESS assessment. Jess ended up using Google Sites, ACCESS practice assessment prompts, and the WIDA rubrics to stretch her students' language resources and avoid assessment anxiety.

MODELING: Provide Mentor Texts With Google Sites

- **How?** Use Google Sites to gather writing samples from students and use some of them as model texts with future classes of students.
- **Why?** Google Sites is a free and user-friendly platform that is simple and easy for teachers and students to access. Having student work from past years organized in this format allows teachers and students to easily access authentic models.

Jess's Anecdote

In 2016, I had a beginner student who was still struggling with basic writing skills in the spring when we do our poetry unit. I sat with the student and asked him about a memory in nature that stood out to him from his home country. I helped him find and write each word, and we counted the syllables together to compose a haiku.

Here is what he wrote:

Scarecrow

scarecrow man of sticks
farmer and black and white cow
elephant at night

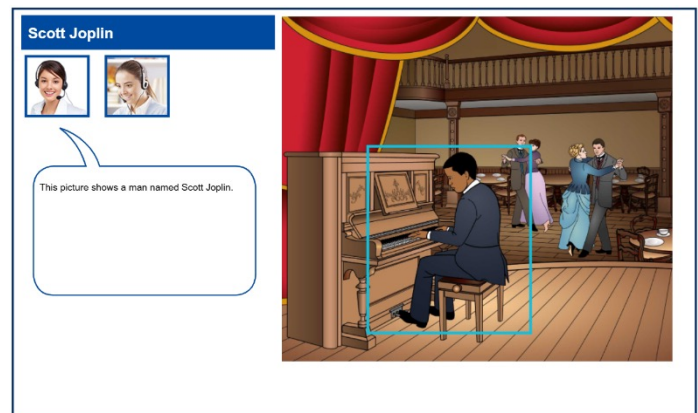
He published the poem on the Google Sites website and recited the poem proudly for the class. I still remember what his voice sounded like as he recited it! We continue to analyze his poem and use it as a model due to its imagery, alliteration, and contrast. The use of Google Sites allows student work to become organically ingrained into a beautifully revolving collection of work whose impact can span decades!

PRACTICING: Provide Opportunities to Engage in Sample Test Prompts

- **How?** Explore the [ACCESS Test Practice and Sample Items](#) to find the grade level(s) you serve and the language domain(s) (reading, writing, listening, or speaking) you would like to practice. Start by going through a prompt with the class and demonstrate a think-aloud with test-taking strategies.
- **Why?** The sample test items are engaging due to their authentic online and paper formats. They are multimodal, and there is a range of content and question types. Students respond well to the sample items and take them seriously because they are so close to what the students will be asked to do on the actual test.

Jess's Anecdote

One year, I was reviewing the Grades 6–8 sample test items with my class, and I selected the Speaking item on Scott Joplin. To provide context, I played the students the song “Maple Leaf Rag,” and two of the students were enthralled with it! They started dancing around the classroom, laughing, and having a great time! I played the song regularly for them in class after that, and they would start dancing and humming along. These students genuinely connected with the content (through sheer enjoyment!), which made a simple test preparation exercise all the more engaging for the whole class!



ASSESSING: Provide Focused Feedback

- **How?** Use the [WIDA Writing Rubric](#) and [Speaking Rubric](#) to analyze student language use and identify next steps to stretch their language resources to be more detailed and varied.
- **Why?** Often students do not understand what their WIDA ACCESS scores mean. By providing explicit feedback on current language use using WIDA rubrics, it allows students to see how they can improve their scores and develop their language skills.

Tips From Jess

- Consider simplifying the language of the WIDA rubrics for students.
- Give clear examples of simple, compound, and complex language structures to students.
- Explore background information of WIDA prompts to build interest and motivation.