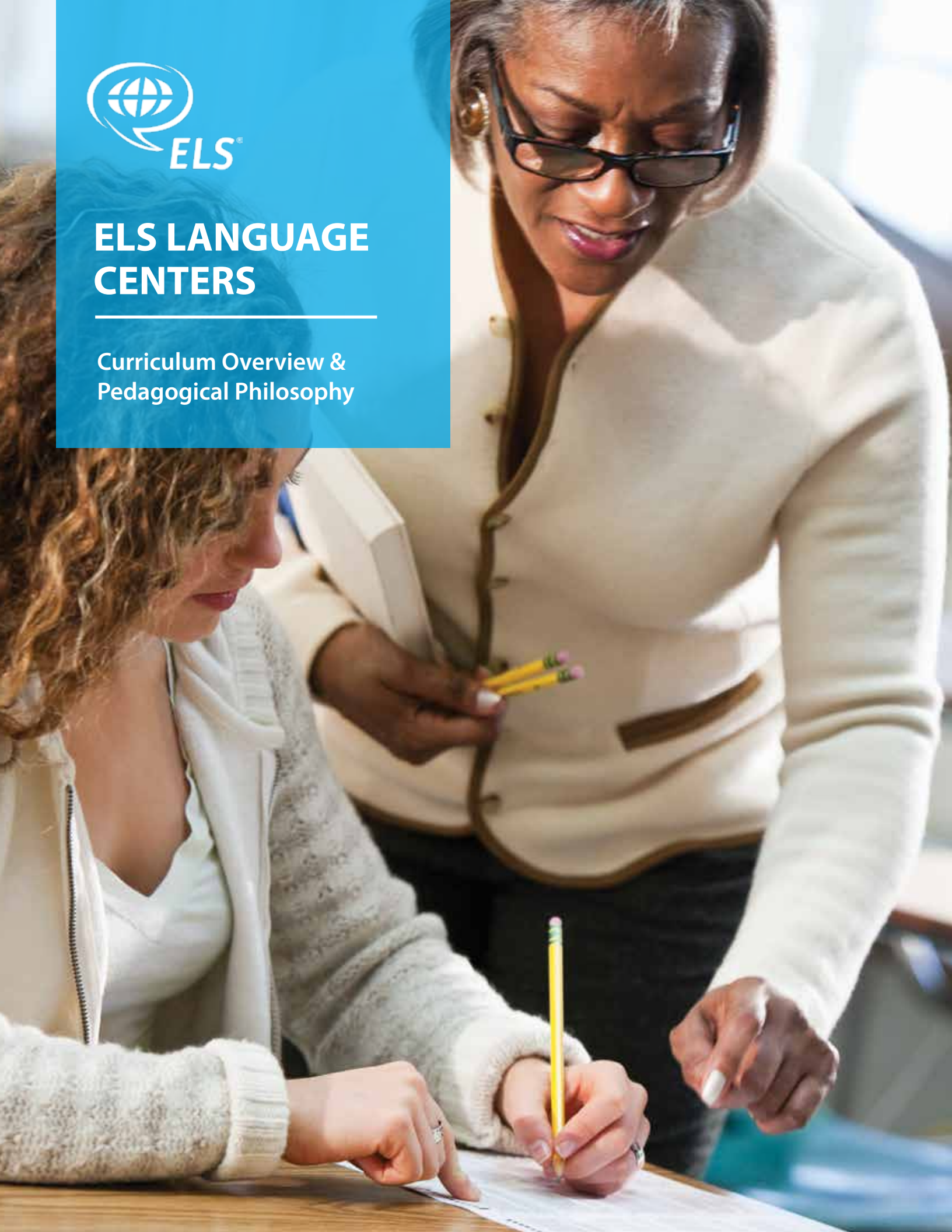




# ELS LANGUAGE CENTERS

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Curriculum Overview &  
Pedagogical Philosophy



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# ELS Background

Headquartered in Princeton, New Jersey, **ELS has been a leader in international student recruitment**, testing, and teaching of English as a second language for over 55 years. With more than 50 Centers located throughout the United States, Canada, and Australia, ELS is the largest campus-based provider of English as a second language instruction. In addition, ELS is the single largest provider of official testing in the U.S.

## **Acceptance of ELS Levels**

**More than 600 colleges and universities worldwide accept completion of the ELS Intensive English for Academic Purposes program** as demonstration of English proficiency for their admission requirement in lieu of the TOEFL iBT® and IELTS™. Among these institutions, completion of ELS Level 112 is accepted by both public and private universities for undergraduate and graduate degree candidates. **Many doctoral programs, including those at highly ranked research institutions, also accept ELS Level 112.** While ELS Level 109 is accepted by community colleges and trade schools, it is also accepted by some undergraduate four-year degree programs.

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# Features of the ELS Language Centers Academic Program

Second language acquisition is unique among academic disciplines in that important opportunities for learning take place both in and out of the classroom. This is reflected in all areas of ELS curriculum planning and program development. Important features of the ELS academic program include:

- Learning that blends academic, practical, and cultural language skills
- A persistent regard for academic integrity
- Customized, proprietary texts
- A comprehensive testing regime
- On-going professional development of ELS academic staff
- On-going review, refinement, and updating of the curriculum
- Student access to and use of the latest language learning technology

## **English for Academic Purposes Curriculum**

Through its English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course of study, ELS Language Centers works to fully prepare students focusing on higher education. Students in this program study 30 lessons per week for four weeks to complete each level, with promotion being dependent upon a detailed assessment strategy (described further below). Program levels range from 101 to 112.

The EAP program at ELS gives students the opportunity to focus on the academic skills they will need to succeed in their pursuit of higher education. EAP students take four hours of morning classes designed to build a foundation of communicative competency: these comprise two Structure & Speaking Practice (in levels 101–109) or Language Studies (in Masters levels 110 – 112) lessons, one lesson of Vocabulary Enrichment (in levels 101 – 109) and one lesson in the Language Technology Center (LTC). In the afternoons, EAP students in every level participate in two hours of Reading and Writing classes. One session during the students' Masters levels (110 - 112), Reading and Writing class is dedicated to a class called Guided Research Skills, in which students learn to process of academic research and complete a short research paper.

## **Learning Outcomes and Student Competencies**

The ELS curriculum consists of detailed objectives, classroom activities, and performance measures for each class. These are summarized in Objectives and Evaluation Criteria (OEC) which are specific to every class taught at ELS. The individual OECs focus on the development of skills-specific performance expectations for

each class. An example of the OEC for SSP Level 109 is on the following page. (Refer to the Appendix for a sample of learning objectives for specific academic Skills Enhancement Classes.) Overall expectations for student competencies at the completion of each level are detailed in the ELS Language Activities Chart (LAC).

Examples of competencies upon completion of level 109, as outlined in the LAC, include:

- **Listening:** Can comprehend interviews and short lectures on familiar topics and news items, meetings, and oral reports primarily dealing with factual information.
- **Speaking:** Can support opinions, summarize issues, explain in detail, hypothesize; participate in a debate; make a presentation.
- **Reading:** Can make inferences about information in a variety of formats.
- **Writing:** Can write and edit an argumentative essay.

Examples of competencies upon completion of Level 112 include:

- **Listening:** Can follow the essentials of extended discourse as in academic/professional settings in lectures, meetings, speeches, and reports.
- **Speaking:** Can give a sustained fact-based or opinion-based presentation based on material drawn from authentic writings and news sources.
- **Reading:** Can comprehend text containing hypotheses, argumentation and opinions which involve grammatical patterns and vocabulary ordinarily encountered in academic, professional, and recreational reading.
- **Writing:** Can analyze and synthesize information from various sources into a written academic format.

## Objectives and Evaluation Criteria

OECs focus on the development of skills-specific performance expectations for each class, and are specific to every class taught at ELS.



# Texts and Materials



## Objectives and Evaluation Criteria Structure/Speaking Practice Advanced—Irving

To pass this SSP **course**, you **must** pass: (1) the class; (2) the SSP final exam; and (3) the final speaking evaluation—all with a minimum grade of 1.0 or higher. To pass your **level**, you must have a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0. If you are in the EAP program, you must **also** earn a 1.0 or higher in your Reading *and* your Writing class, **and** on your final writing evaluation.

### Description

Using this advanced text, you will learn challenging and useful vocabulary and grammar structures to support a wide range of speaking and listening tasks. These skills will apply to both real-world and academic situations.

By the time you have completed the advanced texts, you will have acquired not only passive, but also active, knowledge. This means that you will be able to produce, as well as understand, more complex structures and vocabulary.

### Materials

- *Structure and Speaking Practice: Irving*, by ELS Language Centers and Pearson/Longman, third edition
- Teacher-made materials

### Speaking—By the end of the session, you should be able to

- Compare strengths and weaknesses
- Define intelligence
- Explain how you produce your best work
- Debate preferential treatment for the gifted
- Describe your shortcomings
- Talk about ways to manage stress
- Discuss how to handle anger
- Discuss what's important in your life
- Politely ask someone not to do something
- Complain about public conduct
- Discuss the benefits of music
- Discuss social responsibility

### Listening—By the end of the session, you should be able to

- Take notes during longer listening passages
- Show understanding of main ideas, supporting details, and new vocabulary by referring to the listening and your notes

Evaluation Criteria	%
Participation (active individual, group, and class work, homework)*	25
Speaking evaluations	
Evaluation 1	10
Evaluation 2	15
Midterm or quizzes	25
Final exam	25

\*If you miss 6 or more hours of class you will receive a zero (0) for Participation.

### Grading Conversion

95-100% = 4.0 = A	83-86 = 2.5 = C+	70-74 = 1.0 = D
90-94 = 3.5 = B+	79-82 = 2.0 = C	60-69 = 0.5 = F
87-89 = 3.0 = B	75-78 = 1.5 = D+	0-59 = 0.0 = F

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At the core of the texts and materials used in ELS classes are the ELS customized proprietary texts. Since 1999, ELS Language Centers has used customized texts that are tailored to the specific learning objectives of each level. Rather than building a curriculum around a series of texts, ELS has designed custom texts to match our curricular goals. These proprietary texts are used in all Structure and Speaking Practice (SSP) and Reading and Writing classes in levels 101 – 109.

The ELS proprietary texts are both old and new. They are “old” in the sense of continuing the ELS Language Centers more than 55-year tradition of using high-interest, student-centered, communicative teaching tools to help students learn English. They are “new” in that the proprietary materials, originally introduced in 2001, were the result of a specific, careful selection of proven, recently published ESL materials, actively used worldwide. An updated second edition of these proprietary texts was introduced in 2007 and the third edition of these texts was introduced in traditional bound form, CD-ROM and e-book formats in June 2013. Fourth-edition texts were developed in 2018.

Revisions of the proprietary texts are performed by a Curriculum Review Committee, comprised of ELS Academic Directors and instructors with extensive curriculum development experience. The committee performs a thorough review of the current ELS curriculum and updates the curriculum and texts accordingly. Input is solicited from experienced ELS teachers, and new texts are piloted and edited before the final edition is released. The resulting texts are strongly based in the established communicative traditions. Other elements specifically built into the ELS proprietary textbooks are:

- **Integration of Skills:** Whether a book is an SSP book or a Reading & Writing book, all four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) are integrated and developed.
- **Reinforcement of Skills:** Since these texts are designed around specific elements of a spiraling curriculum, structures are constantly practiced, reviewed, developed and refined as students progress through the levels.

- **Receptive and Productive Skills:** Students can understand (receptive learning) more than they can produce (productive language). In SSP classes, students listen to audio segments which are pitched at a slightly higher level of verbal fluency than expected for students in those classes. This encourages them to move forward and to perform at maximum capacity. The use of audio combined with visuals makes sure that the more challenging material can be understood.
- **Flexible Material:** In Reading and Writing classes, if students complete the assigned readings ahead of schedule, there are many extra reading choices available in each text. The SSP books also incorporate a great deal of flexibility, with a wide range of activities for the teacher to choose from. Teachers are directed to choose activities according to their relative value in meeting both the needs of the students and the learning objectives for each course.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students are required to take basic information and, from the earliest levels on, use inferential, analytical, synthetic, and evaluative skills. These are skills often missing in traditional school settings of some home countries. With language learning comes the learning of these culturally-related thinking patterns important to career and higher-education success in English-speaking countries.

In addition to the customized texts used in SSP and RW classes in levels 101 – 109, ELS uses other advanced texts in the Masters levels (110 – 112). These texts contain authentic material written for native speakers of English. The texts employ a content-based approach specifically designed for college level students. Two of the main texts used in these levels are *University Success* (Pearson) and *Models for Writers* (Macmillan).

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# Testing and Evaluation

Clearly, there is no single assessment tool that can give a complete picture of a student's academic language proficiency. Even the best tests use an artificial platform to mimic the challenges that students face in the academic realm. ETS (Educational Testing Services), the makers of the TOEFL® test, concedes these limitations and acknowledges that TOEFL® tests are "...distinct from other academic activities. (TOEFL) Test tasks and content are likely to be simulations, but not exact replications, of academic tasks" (ETS, 2008).

The key to accurately determining a student's readiness for higher education in a second language is through a thorough assessment of all language skills in as natural a context as possible within the classroom. At ELS Language Centers, assessment is an ongoing process that happens throughout each four-week session and encompasses a wide range of tools beyond traditional norm-referenced or criterion-referenced tests. While ELS does make use of both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced final exams in each level, they account for no more than 25% of a student's final assessment. The assessment strategy that ELS Language Centers employs when evaluating student progress involves the following:

- **Speaking Evaluations:** These are conducted regularly throughout a student's study at ELS. The instructor evaluates the students when they are working in pairs or small groups to assess skills in directed communication and listenership (rather than the practiced skills seen in a speech or report). The evaluations are based on a rubric which outlines speaking skills specific to the ELS levels.
- **Writing Evaluations:** Beginning level students work to develop a solid understanding of sentence and paragraph construction, with multiple short assignments and evaluations. At higher levels, students complete a minimum of two formal writing assignments (including editing and re-writing) every four-week session. These written assignments follow level-specific rhetorical styles ranging from basic descriptive essays in the intermediate levels to argumentation and research in the advanced levels. Detailed rubrics, shared with both teachers and students, guide the assessment process.
- **Reading Evaluations:** Students' reading skills are evaluated throughout the four-week session through reading quizzes. The content of the quizzes is based on level-specific skills as outlined in the ELS Objectives and Evaluation Criteria (e.g. identifying main ideas, drawing inferences and conclusions, etc.)







**95-100 = 4.0 = A**

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- **Exams:** Students in levels 101 – 109 take standardized achievement final exams designed by ELS Language Centers in conjunction with Second Language Testing Inc. (SLTI). SLTI is a leading developer of second language assessment tools, and SLTI's exams are used by institutions around the world. Students in levels 110 - 112 take proficiency exams designed independently from ELS. In 110 and 111, students take a paper-based English proficiency test developed by SLTI. Items on this test are pitched to the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). In level 112, students take a computer-based proficiency test, also designed by SLTI. Items on this test are at the B2/C1 level of the CEFR. The use of standardized tests as part of the overall student assessment provides an objective measure of the students' listening, reading, grammar, and vocabulary, and helps ensure grading consistency from Center to Center.

At ELS Language Centers, a final level assessment consisting of all of these factors is done every four weeks for every student. This assessment is summarized each session in a formal evaluation report and grades for each class are converted to a 4.0 scale. (A sample grade conversion chart is above.) Students who do not achieve a grade point average of 2.0 for the session must repeat the level. Through this comprehensive assessment, ELS is able to identify strengths and weaknesses with specificity. A student may be found not simply to have "weak reading skills" but to have "trouble making inferences from a descriptive reading." This level of detail helps instructors to be more efficient in addressing specific student needs. They do so by writing skill-specific recommendations for improvement into the final grade report, with statements about how the student can make the needed improvements in the next session.

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# Professional Development of Academic Staff

Language instruction is a dynamic profession where theories of language acquisition, cognition, linguistics, and psychology merge. ELS helps instructors stay on top of their profession through monthly in-service professional development workshops. These workshops are led by Academic Directors or experienced instructors and may involve content derived from conferences, professional literature, material taken from the ELS proprietary Teacher Training modules (see below), or classroom experience. The workshops address ESL pedagogy as well as social and cultural issues that may affect the classroom. The content of the workshops is shared with all Centers through bi-monthly Academic Directors' Reports. Examples of in-service workshops include:

- What Makes a Great Teacher?
- Learning Styles and Implications for Teaching
- Classroom Management
- Teacher Collaboration

ELS has developed a series of online Teacher Training modules that serve Center needs for both group training of teachers and individual, self-study training. These modules help ensure consistency in training for all teachers at every Center. The modules have been developed by the Director of Teacher Training and Development and cover a variety of topics essential to quality language instruction. Teachers who are new to ELS are required to complete 10 training modules during their first year of teaching. Topics for these modules range from an introduction to the ELS curriculum to Communicative Language Teaching, Verbal Error Correction, Elicitation and Teacher Talk, and Teaching Listening Comprehension among others. For teachers who have been teaching at ELS for more than one year, the focus of the training modules moves to more nuanced levels of pedagogy and classroom management, such as Working with Chinese Students, Working with Saudi Students, Student Learning Styles and more.

While training modules such as these help to ensure a sound foundation of professional knowledge, there is no substitute for hands-on mentoring. As such, the Academic Director at each Center remains the most important element in assuring quality teaching at the Center. The Academic Director observes every new teacher at least once a session during their first three sessions at ELS. Afterward, all teachers are observed by the Academic Director at least twice a year.



ELS also promotes professional development by encouraging participation in professional workshops and conferences. ELS sponsors membership in TESOL for all Academic Directors and all Instructional Specialists at every Center; in addition, ELS provides financial support and awards for instructors and administrators who present at regional and international TESOL conventions. From 2011 to 2018 alone, ELS teachers and administrators participated in 103 presentations at National TESOL conferences, with many more presenting at the state and regional levels. ELS instructors and Academic Directors have also held numerous leadership positions within TESOL and other national, state and local professional organizations.

Finally, ELS Language Centers maintains an active Curriculum Advisory Board (CAB) made up of seven Academic Directors from ELS Centers throughout North America. The Academic Directors sitting on the CAB serve as mentors for other Academic Directors in their districts, provide practical input on the ELS curriculum, assist in the development of new academic programs, and help shape academic policy. The CAB holds frequent teleconferences and meets annually at the National TESOL conference.

**Examples of in-service workshops include:**

**What Makes  
a Great  
Teacher?**

**Learning Styles  
and Implications  
for Teaching**

**Classroom  
Management**

**Teacher  
Collaboration**



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# Institutional Research

It is a reality that higher education in the U.S. is largely concerned with one's ideas, theories, arguments, and opinions as expressed in conversation or in artful expository writing. These highly valued and carefully evaluated nuances of intellectual discourse are indispensable to academic success, yet they are precisely the skills least well-measured through standardized testing. To ensure that the ELS curriculum is addressing these true needs of the academically bound student, ELS conducts ongoing research to track the performance of ELS students upon matriculation.

First, students who voluntarily agree to participate in a research study sign "Grade Release Waivers" which allow ELS to collect information on the students' GPAs from the colleges and universities they attend. The average cumulative GPAs of more than 500 former ELS students studying in graduate schools at the end of 2017 was 3.44. The average of more than 600 former ELS students studying at the undergraduate level was 2.94.

In 2011, ELS embarked on a more in-depth study of academic success which involved not only an analysis of GPAs, but also a comparison of ELS students' GPAs and time-to-graduation to that of other international students who did not attend ELS, as well as to the domestic student population. Five universities participated in this independent study. Knapp and Associates International gathered the data from the five universities. The data were then analyzed by the Buros Center for Testing at the University of Nebraska. In their 2012 report, the Buros Center for Testing found "no significant statistical difference" in the performance of ELS students relative to other international or domestic students in terms of GPAs or time to graduation. Based on recommendations for further study by the Buros Center, ELS has engaged in a long-term validation study of student success at nine universities. Findings from this three- to five-year study will be reported annually by the Buros Center for Testing.

## **Programmatic Assessment**

All ELS Language Centers in the U.S. are accredited by the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training (ACCET), a national accrediting agency officially recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The first step in the accreditation process involves an extensive analysis of all ELS programs, policies and procedures. This analysis is compiled in the Analytic Self-Evaluation Report (ASER), which details the means by which ELS Language Centers meets the program standards set by ACCET. Through this thorough self-evaluation, ELS is able not only to demonstrate strengths but also to identify areas in need of improvement.

The next step in accreditation involves a site visit by a team which includes a commission representative, a management/administrative specialist and/or a content specialist. These specialists spend several days at the Centers reviewing procedures and observing the processes by which ELS puts into practice the standards outlined





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in the ASER. Accreditation can be granted for up to five years. ELS has been continuously accredited by ACCET since 1978 and has never failed to receive a full five-year accreditation.

In addition to external accreditation, each Center is supervised by a District Director. Annual visits by the District Director afford the Center the opportunity to review processes, and identify strengths and weaknesses.

A final piece in assessing the quality of the ELS program involves direct student feedback. Every four weeks, students participate in a confidential on-line survey which focuses on

a specific school function. Four times a year, these surveys examine the overall academic program and student services. Nine times a year, the surveys focus on the ELS teachers and instruction. These surveys are reviewed monthly by Center administrative staff and District Directors. Instructors review the results of their individual surveys with the Academic Director. This constant feedback from students is invaluable in helping ELS maintain high standards of instruction and student services.

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# Appendix

## Learning Objectives With Prompt, Behavior and Attainment Criteria for Sample Advanced Skills Enhancement Classes

### Reading and Reporting

- 1 Determine topic, main point and answer content questions of articles and academic passages**

Given 10-15 minutes to read a newspaper/magazine article or academic passage, student can determine the main ideas of the passage/articles and can accurately answer basic comprehension questions on a regular basis.

- 2 Present summaries so that others can understand without reading the materials**

Given a newspaper/magazine/internet article, students can accurately capture meaning and key points of the article in a 3-5 minute oral summary so that other members of the group who have not read the article can answer basic comprehension questions about it.

- 3 Infer character motivation and writers' opinions from readings**

Given time to work with the basic ideas and key details of an in-class reading passage, students can take the next step and infer intended motivations and opinions of the writer by "reading between the lines." This will be observed consistently in class discussions.

- 4 Paraphrase, summarize, and communicate opinions, either in writing or orally**

Given passages/articles, students can reduce the information into a succinct, clear, and accurate summary orally and in writing, as well as be able to communicate their own personal opinion about the topic given, to a 75% or better accuracy standard.

- 5 Give peer feedback to help everyone improve their summarization skills**

After reading/listening to a classmate's summary, students can assist their peers in creating more accurate, and more grammatically correct, paraphrases and summaries for the benefit of the student and the peer, on a consistent basis.

### Advanced Academic Vocabulary

- 1 Demonstrate understanding of new vocabulary in academic contexts**

Given instruction and practice with new vocabulary and a quiz context, students will be able to answer with at least 85% accuracy depending on level.

- 2 Demonstrate understanding of reading passages**

Given new reading passages, students will be able to understand the content to a standard of 2.0 for level in class discussions and activities and, on quizzes, with at least 80% accuracy, depending on level.

- 3 Recognize word families and collocations**

Given instruction and practice with word families and collocations and a quiz context, students will be able to answer with at least 80% accuracy depending on level. Students will be able to write using appropriate word forms and collocations to a standard of 2.0 for level.

- 4 Determine the meaning of new words in context**

Given instruction and practice in determining meaning in context, students will be able to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words to a standard of 2.0 for level in class activities and with at least 80% accuracy, according to level in a quiz context.

- 5 Complete writing tasks using new vocabulary**

Given study of new vocabulary and a writing task, students will be able to use new words to paraphrase, summarize, or write short essays to a standard of 2.0 for level.

- 6 Present information orally using academic vocabulary**

Given an oral expansion exercise from the text and group work, students can give an oral presentation using academic vocabulary to a standard of 2.0 for level.

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## Advanced Reading Focus

### 1 Use words from the academic word list

Having been exposed to various types of academic readings, students will be able to use target vocabulary from the academic word list in a test context with 80% accuracy.

### 2 Skim and scan written material for main ideas and supporting details

Having skimmed or scanned a passage, students will be able to determine and communicate the main idea or other specific information as requested by the teacher in a discussion or testing context.

### 3 Identify the pattern of organization of a passage

Given a text, students will be able to identify the pattern of organization at the paragraph and whole-text levels by focusing on topic sentences, signal words, and thesis statements.

### 4 Improve reading speed

Given a text of approximately 900 words, students will show at least a 10% improvement in their reading speed at the end of the session. (This is part of the final quiz criteria).

### 5 Make inferences about a reading

Given a reading passage, students will be able to extract factual information and then make logical inferences identifying the parts of the text that lead to the inferences.

### 6 Write an effective summary of a reading

Given a reading passage, students will be able to write an effective summary (without copying large chunks from the text), including only the main details using as few words as possible.

## Advanced Presentations

### 1 Research, plan and give two informal presentations

Given a topic, students will research, plan and give two informal presentations using grammar and presentation skills appropriate to level to a standard of 2.0.

### 2 Research, plan and give a group presentation of 7-10 minutes using Power Point or another visual component about an element of culture

Given a group presentation assignment, students will choose an element of culture to research, plan and give a presentation using grammar and presentation skills appropriate to level to a standard of 2.0.

### 3 Attend a university class or other formal presentation

Given a university class or other formal presentation, students will attend the presentation, take notes and answer questions from their notes on a written quiz with good accuracy (75% or better), depending on level.

### 4 Engage in class discussions about controversial topics using appropriate vocabulary and grammar

Given controversial topics, students demonstrate understanding by discussing topics with appropriate vocabulary and grammar to a standard of 2.0 on a speaking evaluation rubric, depending on level.



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