

# Language and Learning Interview

## Guidelines for administration and interpretation

The purpose of the Language and Learning Interview is to elicit information about the student's prior learning experiences, including their development of literacy in their home language or other languages and any previous learning of English. Teachers and school leaders can use this information as the basis for their initial determination of the student's starting pathway and level in the English as an Additional Language (EAL) curriculum.

The Language and Learning Interview is used to develop a relationship between the student's family and the school, and to exchange information in order to understand the student's prior learning, the nature of their transition into formal English education, and the point they are at in developing their bilingual or multilingual competence as they begin formal schooling in Australian classrooms. Teachers can use the interview to elicit further details and explanation where appropriate, in order to develop a rich understanding of the student's prior learning experiences and their language and literacy skills. It is crucial that both the family and student understand the purpose of the interview in order to ensure a positive experience.

It is up to the school to select an appropriate time and place to conduct the interview. It is crucial that the interview does not place undue stress and burden on a family that has experienced trauma. Ideally, this interview would be conducted in the early stages of arrival at the school but the most appropriate time should be negotiated with the family.

### 1. Conditions of the meeting

To ensure an efficient and respectful meeting, the following conditions should be met:

- A suitably experienced and prepared member of the school teaching staff should conduct the interview with a parent or guardian, with the student present.
- A qualified interpreter should be used in the interview, unless the parent or guardian either speaks English competently or has assistance from someone of their choosing who speaks English competently. To ensure effective communication and privacy, it is not appropriate to use another student as an interpreter.
- The student and parent or guardian should be made aware of the nature of the discussion and be invited to confirm the details given, when appropriate.
- The interview should be conducted in a suitably quiet and private setting.

### 2. Sequence and purpose of questions

**Question 1: Languages spoken at home.** While most parents and guardians will answer 'Yes' to this question, there may be some circumstances in which an EAL student answers 'No', such as the student is an international student living with an English-speaking host family, the student was adopted by an English-speaking family from overseas, or the student is part of a bilingual or multilingual family using English as their main language in the home. In other circumstances, if English is already a dominant or significant language for the student there needs to be informed exploration as to whether the student should undertake EAL learning. Other strategies and support may be more appropriate.

**Question 2: Previous school attendance and learning.** If the student has lived in more than one country, consider all countries as one country when recording answers to these questions.

► *Information about previous schooling derived from Question 2 can be used to determine the appropriate EAL pathway for the student. The other information about learning experiences can inform the school about the nature of the transition the student is making into formal education in Australian classrooms.*

**Question 3: Literacy in home language and/or other languages.** It is important to understand the previous educational experiences of the student. Some students will have experienced formal schooling, while others may have had interrupted formal schooling or some experience of informal instruction. Language and literacy levels in the home language and/or other languages are likely to reflect the experience of formal schooling in the student's country of origin.

► *Information derived from Question 3 can be used to help determine whether students on EAL Pathways B and C need to begin at Level BL or CL, or at another level on these pathways.*

**Question 4: Previous experience of learning and using English.** It is important to determine the language of instruction the student has experienced, as well as the nature and extent of any previous learning or use of English. Previous learning of English can mean the student already has some knowledge and skills in English, although this depends on how they have been taught and whether there has been a focus on speaking skills as well as writing skills and grammar. When the student is not completely new to English, it may be necessary to use some EAL-focused tasks to determine the extent of their prior learning of English and the most appropriate starting level and pathway for them.

**Question 5: Length of time in Australia.** Knowing how long a student has been in Australia helps to understand the nature of the transition they are making and how best to support them in their learning. A student with more than three years of residence in Australia may be beginning school for the first time and may have lived with a family or extended family whose main language is a language other than English; in these cases, a long period of residence does not preclude the student from being a beginner in terms of learning English. The school may need to use a range of speaking and listening, reading and viewing, and writing tasks to determine the most suitable starting level for a student who has been in Australia for some time.

**Question 6: Previous experience of formal schooling in Australia.** When a student has had prior experience of Australian schools, information on the nature of this experience is useful in determining the most appropriate ways of supporting them. In cases where there has been good support but limited learning, it is worth exploring possible reasons for this situation, including medical conditions, difficulties in adjustment to life in a new country, or attendance at a school where specific EAL instruction was not given.

► *Information derived from Questions 4, 5 and 6 can be used to identify an initial, tentative EAL level on the relevant pathway for the student. This initial EAL level will need to be confirmed through more extensive and systematic assessment of the student's English language skills.*

### 3. Further assessment and monitoring of EAL learner progress

The Language and Learning Interview is a starting point only. The determination of the initial EAL level should be confirmed and then regularly reviewed using a range of EAL assessment tasks across the modes of Speaking and Listening, Reading and Viewing, and Writing. Initially, it is not unusual for a student to improve their performance of the same or similar tasks over a short period of time, as they become more comfortable in their new environment and skills emerge that were not evident when they were less experienced and confident with the English language. It is also

possible that a student who can demonstrate some skills initially makes slower than expected progress if their learning has been limited to formulaic patterns and routines and they must now engage more deeply with the learning content.

The development of EAL students' learning and their use of English in classrooms and the school environment should be constantly and systematically monitored against the EAL curriculum to ensure they are located within the appropriate pathway and making progress at the appropriate level.

In addition to the EAL curriculum achievement standards, resources to assist teachers in judging EAL student progress include online resources for EAL teachers developed by the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

# Language and Learning Interview template

1 Is the main language used at home a language other than English?

Yes. ► *Go to Question 2.*

No. ► *See guidelines. Go to Question 2.*

2 Did [name of student] attend school before arriving in Australia?

Yes. ► *Go to Question 2.1.1.*

No. ► *Go to Question 2.2.*

2.1.1 How long did [name of student] attend school in their country of origin?

less than 1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	9 years	10 years or more
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2.1.2 How would you describe the extent of [name of student]'s prior school learning?

*(Choose the most appropriate statement.)*

- The student studied a full curriculum for the years of school attended.
- The student had significant gaps in learning because of interruptions to school attendance.
- Learning was limited, because hours of classes were limited (less than 4 hours per day, 5 days per week).

► *Go to Question 3.*

2.2 Why didn't [name of student] attend school?

*(Choose the most appropriate statement.)*

- The student attended preschool, but not school.
- The student was not old enough to attend school.
- The student was old enough but had no opportunity to attend school.

3 What can [name of student] read and write in their home language?

*(Tick what can be done.)*

- Can [name of student] read:
  - their name?
  - a children's storybook?
  - school texts for the age at which they attended school?
  - age-appropriate digital texts?
- Can [name of student] write:
  - their name?
  - a familiar simple legend or children's story?
  - a description of something they have learnt about at school or a description of a topic they can talk about?

Are these answers the same for other languages the student speaks? *(If any of these things can be done in more than one language, indicate the languages.)*

**4** Has [name of student] learnt or used English before?

Yes. ► Go to Question 4.1.

No. ► Go to Question 5.

**4.1** How did [name of student] learn English?

*(Choose the most appropriate statement.)*

- The student learnt English at school.
- The student learnt to use English through informal social interactions.
- The student learnt English using the internet or a digital device.
- The student learnt English watching the television.
- Other. *(Please explain.)*

**4.2** How long has [name of student] been learning or using English?

less than 1 year	1 to 3 years	more than 3 years
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**4.3** What can [name of student] do in English?

*(Tick what can be done.)*

	The student can speak and listen, or talk about this	The student can read and write about this
Introduce themselves and exchange basic personal information when they meet someone		
Ask and talk about an immediate situation (such as talk about what they are doing, ask and give directions, or buy something in a shop)		
Describe a familiar aspect of their culture (such as a place, a famous person or an event such as a holiday or festival)		
Describe a topic they feel confident about (such as how to do something, how something works or how something happens)		
Find out about something they don't already know about (such as how something works or an event)		

**5** How long has [name of student] lived in Australia?

less than 1 month	1 to 3 months	6 months to 1 year	1 to 3 years	more than 3 years
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**6** Has [name of student] previously attended preschool or school in Australia?

Yes. ► *Go to Question 6.1.*

No. ► *Conclude the interview.*

**6.1** How long has [name of student] attended school in Australia?

less than 1 month	1 to 3 months	6 months to 1 year	1 to 3 years	more than 3 years
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**6.2** Which statement best describes [name of student]’s experience and progress at school in Australia (according to observations of the teacher with input from the student and family)? (*Choose the most appropriate statement.*)

- The student has made good progress in the time they have attended school in Australia.
- The student has had little support but has made some progress in learning.
- The student has had little support and has made little progress in learning.
- The student has had a lot of support but has made little progress in learning.
- The student has experienced difficulties that have interrupted learning or prevented them from learning very much.

**6.3** **Ask the student:** What are your interests? What are you good at?

**6.4** **Ask the student:** What would you like us to know about you?

**6.5** **Ask the parent or guardian:** What would you like us to know about [name of student]?

► *Conclude the interview.*