



ELA OPTEL Observation Tool

Leveraging OPTEL in the ELA Classroom

About this Resource

The **Observation Protocol for Teachers of English Learners (OPTEL)** is a standardized tool that helps educators assess students' readiness for reclassification, guide instruction to support English language proficiency (ELP) growth, use formative assessment practices, provide targeted feedback, and engage families in conversations about student progress.

The Newsela *Threads & Themes* ELA curriculum is designed to support ongoing observation of students' language development using OPTEL. Its consistent four-phase lesson structure, defined lesson types, and routines create regular, predictable opportunities for teachers to conduct OPTEL observations during key instructional moments.

Assessing Receptive Skills (Listening and Reading)

OPTEL Focus: A student's ability to construct meaning from oral and written grade-level complex texts.

In *Threads & Themes* ELA, receptive skills are best observed during the following instructional moments:

- **Core Reading Lessons:** These lessons focus on engaging with complex anchor texts and text sets through integrated reading and discussion. Teachers can observe how students "construct meaning" while answering 3-5 text-specific questions during Learning in Action.
- **Spark Lessons:** These lessons activate prior knowledge and require students to construct meaning from a "knowledge-builder" resource set. This is an ideal time to assess a student's initial "meaning-making" and their ability to comprehend conversations and discussions at the start of a unit.
- **Academic Discussion Lessons:** During extended, text-based routines like Socratic Seminars or Fishbowls, teachers can monitor whether a student "comprehends conversations and discussions" at a level of parity with peers.

Additional opportunities exist to assess receptive skills through aligned routines.

OPTEL-Aligned Receptive Routines

Routine	OPTEL Skill	Alignment / Focus
Annotation Spot Check	Reading	Directly reveals if a student can mark and explain meaning in complex texts.
Gallery Walk	Reading / Listening	Observes how students comprehend diverse materials (visual/text) and peer responses in a shared space.
Jigsaw Reading	Reading / Listening	Forces deep comprehension of a specific section to teach others, fostering interdependence.
Language Study	Reading	Assesses a student's ability to deconstruct complex syntactic structures to build meaning.
Retell and Paraphrase	Listening / Reading	Checks if a student can reconstruct meaning after listening to or reading grade-level text.
Information Gap	Reading / Listening	Captures whether a student can construct meaning from a complex source and listen carefully enough to peer contributions to assemble the full picture.
Iterative Conversation	Reading / Listening	Reveals whether comprehension and reasoning deepen with repeated text engagement and exposure to peer responses.
Fishbowl Conversation	Listening	Both groups demonstrate sustained comprehension of complex, peer-led, text-based discourse.

Assessing Expressive Skills (Speaking and Writing)

OPTEL Focus: A student's ability to use syntax, academic vocabulary, and discourse structures to effectively express ideas.

In *Threads & Themes* ELA, expressive skills are best observed during the following instructional moments:

- **Core Writing Lessons:** These lessons provide direct, explicit instruction in writing strategies and skills like subject-verb agreement or transition words. Reviewing student drafts during **Learning in Action** allows for targeted assessment of written expressive skills and the use of general academic terms.
- **Research Lessons:** As students synthesize learning to form claims with aligned evidence and reasoning, teachers can observe their ability to express grade-level ideas effectively.
- **Showcase Lessons:** This is a signature performance event—whether a writing-based task or an oral presentation—where students deliver extended language production. Teachers use rubrics and exemplars to capture summative evidence of a student's ability to use register-appropriate word choices.

Additional opportunities exist to assess expressive skills through aligned routines.

OPTEL-Aligned Expressive Protocols / Routines

Routine	OPTEL Skill	Alignment / Focus
Collaborative Revision Protocol	Writing	Assesses students' ability to revise writing using a peer-review checklist focused on sentence structure, clarity, and evidence integration linked to text analysis.
Four Corners Debate	Speaking	Observes how students verbally defend a stance and justify it with specific textual evidence.
Socratic Seminar	Speaking	Captures sustained, student-led discussion using textual evidence and academic register.

Sentence Expansion	Writing	Evaluates how students add precision (who, what, where, why) to simple ideas to build complex sentences.
Think-Pair-Write-Share	Writing / Speaking	Tracks the refinement of an idea from a silent "think" to a precise written claim for public share.
Quick Write	Writing	Frequent use across lessons makes this a high-yield window into a student's syntax, academic vocabulary, and ability to organize ideas in writing.
Reflect and Response Dialogue	Speaking	Captures expressive use of academic register and text evidence in discussion.
Rehearse and Refine (Presentations)	Speaking	Direct observation of register-appropriate oral language production as students rehearse and refine an extended presentation with peer feedback.

Link to OPTEL [User Guide](#) (CA DOE)