newsela Threads & Themes

Designated ELD Routines Guide

A Teacher's Reference for Designated ELD Routines, Language Coaching, and Formative Assessment, Grades 6–8

Table of Contents

How to use this guide **3**

Section 1: Academic Discussion **4**

1.1 Think-Pair-Share 4

1.2 Give One, Get One 4

1.3 Graffiti / Table Talk 4

1.4 Group Accountability Share 5

1.5 Information Gap 5

1.6 Socratic Seminar 6

1.7 Reflect-and-Respond Dialogue 6

1.8 Iterative Conversation 7

1.9 Collaborative Idea Board 7

1.10 High-Five Partners 7

1.11 Only New Ideas 8

1.12 Structured Oral Rehearsal 8

1.13 Language Reflection 9

Section 2: Reading **10**

2.1 Close Read & Annotation 10

2.2 Gallery Walk 10

2.3 Jigsaw Reading 10

2.4 Fluency Practice 11

Section 3: Language **12**

3.1 Language Objective Launch 12

3.2 Sentence Study 12

3.3 Multimodal Vocabulary Support 13

Section 4: Writing **14**

4.1 Modeled Writing 14

Section 5: Listening **15**

5.1 Rebuild the Read 15

Section 6: Check for Understanding **16**

6.1 Formative Language Output 16

Section 7: A few things to keep in mind **17**

How to use this guide

This guide is for teachers implementing the Newsela *Threads & Themes* program for Designated ELD (D-ELD). Each routine has a short description, a note on why we use it, and 3 or more implementation notes.

The implementation notes are deliberately not procedural. Each lesson already gives you the in-the-moment script for the routine — partner roles, sentence frames, the prompt, the look-fors — and the routine, sentence, or text has been chosen for you. These notes are about what the lessons can't tell you: coaching students into the routine over time, troubleshooting when it isn't landing, and noticing growth across multiple uses, not just today.

Routines are the connective tissue of the curriculum. They are predictable, repeatable structures that free students to focus on language and ideas rather than on figuring out what to do. For Multilingual Learners, this predictability is not a nice-to-have; it is a lever for access. When the routine is familiar, the cognitive load shifts to the language work itself.

A Note on Student Action

Every routine is paired with a default action students take on the page — a Notes Section, Write-on Lines, a Graphic Organizer, a Personal Dictionary, a Journal, or NONE when the work is purely oral. These actions are intentional: they match the thinking the routine is designed to produce. Stick with the default unless you have a specific reason not to.

Section 1: Academic Discussion

Routines in this domain build students' ability to talk productively about ideas — taking turns, building on peers, using precise academic language, and listening actively. Oral rehearsal of language is one of the strongest strategies for language growth for Multilingual Learners, which is why this is the largest category of routines in the curriculum.

1.1 Think-Pair-Share

What it is: Students think silently for a short stretch, talk it through with a partner, then share with the whole group.

Why we use it: It gives every student — including those who need processing time — a chance to speak before a whole-class share. Often the difference between the same three hands going up and broad participation.

Implementation Notes

- **Train the talk yourself.** For the first few times, model the partner exchange — including a stalling moment and a recovery — so students hear what good partner talk sounds like.
- **Watch for growth in the frames.** Are students starting to extend beyond the scripted frames over time? Same-level use of frames week after week means the prompt isn't pushing.
- **Sharpen the prompt before extending think time.** Thin partner talk usually means the prompt is doing too little, not that students need more silence.
- **Notice when you're tempted to substitute.** Think-Pair-Share is the most common over-default. The rotation across different routines is what keeps students exposed to varied talk structures — running the named routine, even when it's harder, is part of the curriculum's language plan.

1.2 Give One, Get One

What it is: Students generate ideas on their own, then circulate trading ideas with peers — giving one of theirs and getting one back each time.

Why we use it: It combines individual accountability (every student arrives with something) with broad exposure to peer thinking. By the end, students have their own idea plus a handful of others to draw on.

Implementation Notes

- **If the room turns chaotic, tighten the rotation structure.** Free roaming works once students have used the routine a few times; until then, fixed stations or numbered partner rounds give the structure students need to focus on the language exchange, not the movement.
- **Track exchanges, not time.** “Trade with three different partners” creates sharper accountability than “circulate for five minutes.”
- **The debrief is the lesson.** Surface patterns across what students collected — that's the takeaway, not the individual exchanges. Without it, the routine becomes social.

1.3 Graffiti / Table Talk

What it is: Students silently write ideas on shared charts before orally summarizing patterns to their group.

Why we use it: It opens space for every student to contribute in writing first, then names the patterns that surface — useful for activating prior knowledge or processing without putting any single student on the spot.

Implementation Notes

- **Coach the shift from generating to connecting.** Without an explicit cue, students stay in list-making mode the whole time and the chart never becomes a thinking space. Two marker colors and a clear mid-routine signal — "now switch colors and draw lines between ideas" — moves them into the connecting work.
- **Summarize, don't transcribe.** Press groups with "What did we keep coming back to?" instead of "Read the chart aloud." The patterns are the point.
- **Save the chart.** Charts from week 1 next to charts from week 4 of a unit make language growth visible — to students, to coaches, and to you.

1.4 Group Accountability Share

What it is: Students think individually, write a private response, build group consensus, then a randomly selected member reports out for the group.

Why we use it: It keeps small-group talk honest. Because anyone could be called, every student has a reason to contribute and follow the conversation closely.

Implementation Notes

- **If accountability is slipping, the randomness needs to LOOK random.** "Pick someone" reads as a teacher's choice and students relax. A deck of cards, a name picker, or numbered slips visibly drawn keeps every student preparing to be the one called on.
- **Expect a rough first run each year.** Consensus-building is unfamiliar to most middle schoolers. Don't drop the routine after one rocky use; the third use is where it pays off.
- **One quick follow-up question.** After the group share, ask the called-on student a brief clarifying question. It signals that being called doesn't end the work.

1.5 Information Gap

What it is: Two partners hold different pieces of information and must ask and answer questions to complete a task neither can do alone.

Why we use it: It creates a genuine reason to communicate. Because neither partner can succeed without the other, students have to produce and understand language — not just listen politely.

Implementation Notes

- **Walk the perimeter.** Students will angle materials away from peers if they sense you watching for leaks. Circulate around partnerships, not between them.
- **Stuck pairs are a comprehension flag.** A partnership that can't progress usually has a vocabulary or topic-knowledge gap that's worth addressing whole-class — not just for that pair.
- **When pairs stall, look at the proficiency match.** Two Emerging students together often run out of question forms to bridge the gap. Mixed-level pairs (Emerging with Expanding) sustain the exchange, and the Expanding student gets practice modeling the question moves.

1.6 Socratic Seminar

What it is: A structured, student-led discussion of a text or question, conducted in an inner/outer circle, where students build on each other's ideas using prepared notes.

Why we use it: This is where the curriculum's language and content work comes together. Students synthesize a text, defend claims with evidence, and engage with peers' ideas while the teacher's role shifts to listening and tracking.

Implementation Notes

- **If the seminar dies fast, the class has likely landed in agreement too early.** That's your one allowable intervention: push back from a different angle in the text to re-open the question. After that, return to silence and let the students do the work of re-engaging.
- **Give the outer circle a job.** A simple tally (speaks once / builds on a peer / brings evidence) keeps them listening rather than waiting. The tally is for their inner-circle partner, not for you.
- **The teacher's silence is the work.** Resist clarifying or redirecting. Let a peer do it; if no peer steps in, that's its own data.
- **Debrief language moves, not just ideas.** “Whose stem moved the conversation?” lands differently than “Whose idea was best?” and trains attention to the discourse work.

1.7 Reflect-and-Respond Dialogue

What it is: Each student picks three quotes from a shared text, writing the quote on the front of an index card and their reasoning on the back. In groups of three, the card-holder reads the quote aloud, peers discuss it, then the card-holder reads the back of the card — having the "last word."

Why we use it: It slows conversation in a productive way. The two peers have to engage with the quote before the card-holder reveals their reasoning, which builds active listening and prevents speakers from defending a position before peers can think.

Implementation Notes

- **Coach the quote selection step.** Students who pick weak quotes have weak discussions. As they choose, press them: "What in this passage made you stop? What surprised you?" The selection is part of the language work, not a preamble to it.
- **Allow re-reads.** The two non-card-holders are listening to a quote without context — make it OK to ask for it again before they respond.
- **Save the cards.** They're a record of student-text engagement that's useful for parent conferences, IEP meetings, or your own end-of-unit reflection.

1.8 Iterative Conversation

What it is: Students draft a written response, articulate it to a partner across 2–3 rounds with structured peer feedback, then write a revised final draft.

Why we use it: Repetition is the engine of oral language development. Each round, students integrate feedback and self-corrections to produce a stronger version. By round three, most students are speaking with noticeably more precision.

Implementation Notes

- **Coach actively in Round 1.** That round sets the bar for feedback quality across all subsequent rounds; coaching later won't reach back and fix the early exchanges.
- **Hold partners until the second draft is written.** The rewrite is where the language move consolidates — switching too soon loses it.
- **Compare draft 1 to final draft.** The delta — not the talk — is the formative evidence for the language goal. Look for the target structure showing up in the revision, not just smoother sentences.

1.9 Collaborative Idea Board

What it is: As students discuss, the teacher (or a designated student scribe) captures sentence-level language onto a shared chart or digital board, then revoices it toward more academic forms.

Why we use it: It makes thinking visible across the room and creates a stable collective reference students can return to during writing or further discussion.

Implementation Notes

- **Capture in chunks, not continuously.** Stop after every 3–5 utterances to revoice and organize. Continuous scribing produces a wall of words students can't read patterns in.
- **Edit as you scribe.** The board is a teaching tool, not a transcript. As you capture, ask yourself "Is this language tied to today's goal?" — and let the rest go. Trying to record everything fills the board with noise students can't read patterns in.
- **Open the next lesson with the board.** "Last time you said ___; today we'll push that further" — that's how a chart becomes a stable reference rather than yesterday's display.

1.10 High-Five Partners

What it is: A self-selecting partner-formation routine: students stand, mingle, and form a pair by touching raised hands, then complete a teacher-assigned task.

Why we use it: It re-energizes the class and breaks fixed seating partnerships. Brief, novel partnerships often produce different thinking than a usual neighbor would.

Implementation Notes

- **If the routine isn't producing energy, the contrast has worn off.** The lift comes from novelty — when High-Five Partners stops feeling different, students aren't going to wake up for it. Pull it off rotation for a couple of weeks and let the freshness restore.
- **Don't over-explain.** Three minutes of directions kills the routine before it starts. The speed is the point — keep setup under 30 seconds, even if some students miss a beat. They'll catch up by the second use.
- **Name the task before they move, not after.** Students form pairs quickly but then stand looking at each other without direction. The language expectation — what they'll say, ask, or write — has to land before hands go up, not once the room is in motion.

1.11 Only New Ideas

What it is: Students write a list in response to a prompt, then the teacher whips around the room asking each student for one new idea not yet mentioned. Students may pass.

Why we use it: It forces close listening. Students cannot rehearse and tune out — they have to track what has been said and adjust in real time. The fast pace surfaces breadth of thinking quickly.

Implementation Notes

- **Build a visible counter.** A chart tally of ideas as they're shared offloads the working-memory cost of tracking what's been said — especially helpful for MLs.
- **The first contribution sets the bar.** Start with a student you trust to set a strong tone; calling on a struggling student first puts them on the spot when the rules are still being learned.
- **Protect the front-end think time.** A full two minutes for the list is what makes this routine work for MLs — cutting it short defeats the routine and leaves quieter students out.

1.12 Structured Oral Rehearsal

What it is: Before a writing task, students practice saying their planned response aloud — to themselves, to a partner, or chorally — using the lesson's target sentence frame.

Why we use it: Oral rehearsal primes language production and reduces the cognitive load of simultaneous composing and transcribing. It is a low-stakes space to try out academic forms before committing them to paper.

Implementation Notes

- **Two-times rule.** Rehearse, get partner feedback, say it again. The second saying is where precision actually improves; without it, the routine is just talk.
- **Don't accept "I already know what to say."** If you didn't hear the rehearsal, it didn't happen. Press: "Let me hear it."
- **Call out the connection when Modeled Writing precedes the rehearsal.** Make the bridge explicit: "Remember the language move I just modeled? Now you'll rehearse it before you write." That naming is what makes the day's routines feel sequenced rather than separate.

1.13 Language Reflection

What it is: A short, fully oral metacognitive prompt at the close of a lesson asking students to name or reflect on the language they used or learned.

Why we use it: Language growth accelerates when students notice their own language use. This routine builds the habit of reflecting on language as a tool, which is central to the D-ELD approach.

Implementation Notes

- **Resist content reflection.** Students will default to "I learned about X." Redirect to language: "What did you say or write differently today?"
- **Use what students say to plan tomorrow.** Confusion about a frame, or excitement about a new connector, is direct data for tomorrow's Language Objective Launch.
- **The payoff is long-game.** Public reflection builds the habit of private noticing — students don't show that today, but you'll see it weeks in when they self-correct in their own writing.

Section 2: Reading

Reading routines build students' ability to make meaning from complex text — noticing structure, tracking evidence, and reading with fluency and stamina. In D-ELD, reading is always coupled with language work: students don't just comprehend, they use the text as a source of language to study and reuse.

2.1 Close Read & Annotation

What it is: A Model → Guided Practice → Partner Work protocol where students reread a short passage with a specific language analysis lens, annotating for a target language feature (e.g., transitional language, evidence markers, sentence structures).

Why we use it: In D-ELD, annotation is a metalinguistic act: students mark not just what the text says, but how the language is working. The annotations become evidence they can return to in writing.

Implementation Notes

- **Anchor the key visually throughout the read.** Students who annotate without referencing the displayed key slip back into content-level marking. Keep it in their line of sight, and pause mid-paragraph to model the look-back: “Which feature am I checking for here?”
- **Carry past keys forward.** Last week's “transitional language” anchor chart sits next to this week's “evidence markers.” The keys layer; the language thinking compounds.
- **Disagreements between partner annotations are productive.** Coach into the conversation rather than away — “Why did you mark that and your partner didn't?” is where language thinking shows.

2.2 Gallery Walk

What it is: Texts, images, or student work are posted around the room. Students circulate, read or view each one, and capture thinking using a three-column organizer (Notice / Wonder / Connect).

Why we use it: It lets students encounter multiple texts at their own pace. The organizer keeps the activity from becoming passive looking — students return with structured observations ready to discuss.

Implementation Notes

- **If the walk feels backed up, stagger your station starts.** Send half the class to one station first and the other half to a different one — bottlenecks break, and the routine recovers its pace.
- **The organizer is the accountability.** If every student doesn't return with a filled-in Notice/Wonder/Connect, the walk was social, not academic. Circulate during the walk and check organizers — coach an empty one back into use right then, not at the debrief.
- **Listen for surfacing patterns as students circulate.** The patterns students name are tomorrow's lesson opener. Capture two or three you hear in real time so you can bring them back the next day — the walk produces planning data, not just engagement.

2.3 Jigsaw Reading

What it is: Students each read a different section of a longer text in expert groups, then regroup with peers who read different sections and teach each other.

Why we use it: It lets students engage with more content than they could read alone, and — critically — it makes every student the authority on their piece. Teaching is a powerful driver of comprehension.

Implementation Notes

- **If the teach-out falls flat, look upstream at the expert groups.** Heterogeneous expert groups (mixed proficiency levels) help students support each other reading; teaching groups with one expert per section make the synthesis work. A weak teach-out usually means the expert group didn't read together long enough.
- **Rehearse inside the expert group.** Coach: "Practice your teach to your expert group before you go to your teaching group." The coherence of the teach-out improves dramatically with even two minutes of dry-run.
- **Notice that students retain mainly their own section.** Language exposure compounds when one of the other sections circles back later in the unit — surface this for yourself so you can plan a follow-up read or reference.

2.4 Fluency Practice

What it is: Students read a short passage aloud — often in echo, choral, or partner reading — focused on accuracy, pace, and expression.

Why we use it: For middle schoolers, fluency is not a decoding issue — it is a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. For Multilingual Learners, reading aloud also builds the ear for English prosody and phrasing in ways silent reading cannot.

Implementation Notes

- **Read with the rhetorical work in mind.** Your read-aloud during I Do is the prosodic model — emphasize what's doing rhetorical work (a contrast, an emphasis, a turn) so students hear what prosody is for, not just that you're reading aloud.
- **Echo-then-partner is the recipe.** Echo reading first builds the prosodic model; skipping that step costs you in partner reading. Don't skip echo even when students seem fluent on the page — the structural pause patterns are what students borrow.
- **Record students once a quarter.** Hearing themselves read — and comparing recordings across the year — is one of the most powerful self-assessment tools available. Students often catch their own word-by-word reading before you have to name it.

Section 3: Language

Language routines target the structures and vocabulary students need to express academic ideas. These routines make language itself the object of study — students don't just use new words and sentence patterns, they examine how they work.

3.1 Language Objective Launch

What it is: At the start of a lesson, the teacher names the language objective and students briefly engage with it — predicting, paraphrasing, or connecting it to what they already know.

Why we use it: Multilingual Learners benefit from knowing what language they are working on, not just what content. When the objective is explicit, students can notice their own growth and use the target language more deliberately.

Implementation Notes

- **Connect to yesterday.** "Yesterday's goal was ___; today we extend it to ___" makes objectives feel like a sequence rather than a list. Without that bridge, students treat each lesson's goal as new — and the cumulative effect of language work is lost.
- **Notice when an objective hits from a new angle.** Across a week, the same target often appears in different modes — read for it one day, write with it another. Calling out that connection helps students see the language target, not just today's lesson.
- **Coach the unpack of the objective itself.** Before students restate it, ask: why those verbs? What do they ask you to do? A quick two-minute unpack of the objective is part of the language work — and it pays off later when students reach for the target structure on their own.

3.2 Sentence Study

What it is: Students read, unpack, examine, and transform a single carefully chosen, meaning-dense sentence from the unit text. The sentence itself becomes the object of study.

Why we use it: A single well-chosen sentence can teach what a grammar lesson cannot. When students see how a complex structure does its work in a real text, they can borrow it for their own writing. This is the curriculum's "juicy sentence" tradition.

Implementation Notes

- **Name only one or two language moves during I Do.** The sentence on the page is often doing several things at once. Coach yourself to focus the noticing on just the move that anchors the lesson's language goal — the rest can stay invisible. Trying to teach everything at once dilutes the whole routine.
- **Notice when students start spotting the structure outside the unit text.** When a student calls out the studied structure in another class's reading or in their own draft, that's the cross-context recognition you're aiming for. Surface it whenever you hear it: "You just spotted that move on your own — that's the goal."
- **Don't skip the marking.** Bracketing, color-coding, or chunking the sentence in real time during the We Do is where structure becomes visible. Narrating it isn't enough — students need to see the structural cuts on the page so they can carry the visual into their own annotation later.

3.3 Multimodal Vocabulary Support

What it is: New vocabulary is introduced through multiple modes — image, gesture, example sentence, translation, cognate connection — rather than a single definition.

Why we use it: Words stick when they are encountered in multiple ways. For Multilingual Learners, connecting to a first-language cognate or an image can be the anchor that makes a new word usable.

Implementation Notes

- **Coach students to pick their own anchor.** After you've shown the image, gesture, and cognate, ask which one helped most before they record it in their Personal Dictionary. That metacognitive ownership is what makes the entry stick — and over time, students start narrating their own anchor preferences.
- **Notice whether words are reappearing in student talk and writing.** Words from week 1 should be showing up in week 3 prompts and student responses. If they're not, students aren't being asked to use them later — surface this for yourself and reach for those words when you set up partner talk or Look Back prompts.
- **Don't gloss back to English.** For some students, the image, gesture, or cognate IS the definition. Reducing it to a one-word English equivalent defeats the purpose of the multimodal entry — let the visual or cognate stand on its own.

Section 4: Writing

Writing routines in D-ELD focus on the interaction between thinking, talking, and writing. Modeled writing makes the invisible work of composing visible — and paired with oral rehearsal and sentence study, it gives students a clear path from ideas in their heads to sentences on the page.

4.1 Modeled Writing

What it is: The teacher writes in front of students, thinking aloud and naming language choices — not just what to write, but why a particular structure or connector is being used.

Why we use it: Students rarely see skilled writers at work. Modeled writing demystifies the process by making the writer's thinking audible, which is especially important for Multilingual Learners.

Implementation Notes

- **Make a mistake on purpose.** Cross out a word, revise, narrate the revision aloud. Polished modeling teaches students that writing is supposed to come out clean — and they freeze when their own drafts don't. Visible revision is part of the model.
- **Call out the connection to the week's mentor sentence.** "Remember the sentence with the ___ structure? Watch how I borrow that here" — the connections between Sentence Study and Modeled Writing compound across the week, but only if you make them explicit.
- **If you've lost the room mid-model, wrap up.** Even mid-sentence. Modeling stamina is yours, not theirs — twelve minutes is the working ceiling, and pushing past it costs you more than the unfinished example does.

Section 5: Listening

Listening is often the forgotten domain in ELA — but for Multilingual Learners, active listening is foundational. The routine in this domain asks students to listen with purpose and reconstruct what they heard.

5.1 Rebuild the Read

What it is: A short complex text is read aloud three times. After each read, students capture key words and phrases and work collaboratively to reconstruct the text as closely as possible.

Why we use it: Listening without visual support pushes students to attend to meaning, not decoding. The collaborative reconstruction step fills gaps through peer conversation, and the comparison to the original surfaces what students caught and missed.

Implementation Notes

- **Read with the cohesion in mind.** Slow down on the connectors and emphasize them as you read — those are the structural anchors students will need to rebuild. Your read is doing more than carrying meaning; it's exposing the text's shape.
- **The third read is the catch read.** Students stop trying to remember everything and start filling in transitions, connectors, precise words. That's where the language work actually lives — protect time for it instead of moving on after read two.
- **Always project the original at the end.** Without the side-by-side comparison, the routine is just listening practice. The compare step is what makes it metalinguistic — that's when students notice the connectors and structures they missed.

Section 6: Check for Understanding

Check for Understanding (CFU) routines are short, formative, and responsive. They are not tests — they are moments designed to surface what students are thinking so the teacher can adjust in the next five minutes, not next week.

6.1 Formative Language Output

What it is: A brief written production task — one or two sentences on the Write-on Lines — that opens the Look Back. Students respond to a targeted prompt that requires the lesson's target language feature.

Why we use it: Language objectives need language evidence. A quick written output gives the teacher a direct read on every student — not just the volunteers — and tells them whether to move on, reteach, or pull a small group.

Implementation Notes

- **Sample 5–7 responses, not all of them.** You're looking for patterns, not grading. Full reads slow you down without adding signal.
- **Sort responses by proficiency band as you scan.** Are Emerging students hitting the Emerging look-for? Are Expanding students hitting the Expanding look-for? That's the formative question, not whether the content is right.
- **Photograph 2–3 anonymized responses.** Bringing them back tomorrow as exemplars — "Here's what a strong use of the frame looked like" — closes the loop between today's data and tomorrow's instruction.

Section 7: A few things to keep in mind

The routines are not a menu of nice-to-have activities. They are the curriculum's theory of how language grows — through predictable structures, repeated oral rehearsal, visible language study, and formative feedback tight enough to change what happens in the next five minutes.

When you wonder which routine to skip, the answer is usually: none of them, but not all at once. The routines are designed to rotate across a lesson arc so that students experience all four modalities (reading, writing, speaking, listening) and work on language at multiple levels (word, sentence, discourse) across a week.

- **Vary the routine.** Don't default to the same routine in consecutive lessons. Watch for over-reliance on Think-Pair-Share.
- **One routine at a time.** Don't combine or layer routines within a single lesson section.
- **The first two weeks are training.** After that, students know what to do and the routines run on rails — but only if the structures are consistent in those first ten lessons.
- **The Look Back is non-negotiable.** Formative Language Output and Language Reflection appear in that order in every four-phase lesson. They are how you see if the lesson worked.