

Diagnostic interview

Guidelines for administration and interpretation

The purpose of the diagnostic interview is to elicit information about the student's prior learning experiences, including their development of literacy in their first language (L1) 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 on the EAL curriculum.

The intent of the diagnostic interview is to develop a relationship between the family and the school, and also to exchange information in order to understand the EAL student's prior learning, the nature of their transition into formal English-immersion 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.

1. Conditions of the interview

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

- A suitably experienced and prepared member of 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 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', because they are using English at home, such as when the student is an international student living with an English-speaking host family, or was adopted by an English-speaking family from overseas, or 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 diagnoses and support may be more appropriate.

Question 2: School attendance and learning in the country of origin. 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 first and/or other languages. It is important to understand the educational experiences of the student in their country of origin. 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 L1 or other languages are likely to reflect the experience of formal schooling in students' countries 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 of students, as well as the nature and extent of any learning or use of English in their country of origin. Previous learning of English can mean EAL students already have 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 knowledge of grammar. When students are 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.

Question 5: Length of time in Australia. Knowing how long a student has been in Australia helps in understanding the nature of the transition they are making and how best to support them in their learning. Some students with more than three years of residence in Australia will be those who are beginning school for the first time and who have lived in families and extended families 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. Schools may need to use a range of reading and viewing, writing, and speaking and listening tasks to determine the most suitable starting level for students who have been in Australia for some time.

Question 6: Previous experience of formal schooling in Australia. When students have 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 or difficulties in adjustment to life in a new country.

► *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 EAL learner progress

The diagnostic 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 all modes of communication. Initially, it is not unusual for students 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 in a more tentative and hesitant frame of mind. It is also possible that some students who can demonstrate some skills initially make 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 at the appropriate level.

In addition to the EAL curriculum achievement standards, resources to assist teachers in judging student progress could include the online resources for EAL teachers developed by the Victorian Department of Education and Training and the EAL Developmental Continuum P–10.

Diagnostic 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 first language?

(Tick what can be done.)

- Can [name of student] read:
 - their name?
 - a children's storybook?
 - school textbooks for the age at which they attended school?
- Can [name of student] write:
 - their name?
 - a simple legend or children's story they know from their country of origin?
 - 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 by talking to people (either native speakers of English or other people who speak English) in their country of origin.
- The student learnt English using the internet or a computer at home.
- 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 the 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 something familiar about their country of origin (such as a place, a famous person or an event such as a holiday or festival)		
Describe a topic they know 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 the student's experience and progress at school in Australia? (*Choose the most appropriate statement.*)

- The student has made good progress in the time they have attended school in Australia.
- The student 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 and help but has made little progress in learning.
- The student has experienced difficulties that have interfered with learning or prevented them from learning very much.

► *Conclude the interview.*