

Quick Writes

Before having students share orally in a brainstorm, give them a chance to write or draw their thoughts first.

For example:

In two minutes, write down everything you can about our community.
(Single words, phrases, bulleted points, webs, and drawings are all acceptable.)

This gives you a chance to circulate and get a sense of what individual students know. You can also take this opportunity to meet with one or two ELL students and 'give' them ideas if they have not come up with any independently. Then you can call on those students first, allowing them to feel engaged and successful as you begin your lesson.

Why is this a good strategy for ELL students?

ELL students can struggle in whole class brainstorms for many reasons. Sometimes the pace is too fast for them to translate and understand what is being discussed. Sometimes the vocabulary during a content-related brainstorm can be inaccessible to an English language learner. Also, some students invariably raise their hands quickly, causing the ELL student who is trying to think through a response to feel discouraged and not participate.

A Quick Write allows all students to gather their thoughts (translating if necessary) and have something to share before the teacher begins the oral discussion. A Quick Write also provides the teacher with a few moments to pre-teach key vocabulary that will be needed during the oral part of the lesson to a small group of ELL students. One added benefit to this strategy is that a Quick Write provides the teacher with an informal pre-assessment of what each student brings to the discussion (especially if you have students turn them in).