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Letters to Parents ESL

*Ready-to-Use Letters and Activities to Send Home
in English and Spanish*

Diane Pinkley

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Dedication

As always, to my children Gregoria, Jose, and Montserrat; to my wonderful grandson Adrian;
and to my sister Jennifer, who has shown unfailing love and support throughout.



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Preface

The joys and satisfactions of teaching children from a variety of different cultures are many. However, the fact that these children and their families do have different languages, cultures, traditions, and expectations presents teachers with a number of challenges.

One of these challenges is the introduction of the idea that parental involvement is welcomed in American schools, and even expected to a certain degree. In many cultures, parental participation through consultation with a child's teachers, through a parent-teacher organization, or through shared activities at home is unknown. In fact, in some cultures, parents would never dream of approaching their child's teachers for any reason, as this would be considered a sign of disrespect or a sign that the teacher was not meeting the child's needs. It is therefore important to reinforce the idea of parental involvement and to point out what educators know to be true—that parents play a vital role in the cultural, social, emotional, and intellectual development of their children.

Letters to Parents: ESL is of particular value in encouraging parents of children studying English as a Second Language (ESL) to become involved in their children's educational development. Each letter is directed to ESL parents and contains a brief explanation of the importance of their participation, as well as simple activities focused on developing essential skills, which they may share with their children at home. These activities are designed to reinforce work done in the ESL classroom and address a wide variety of skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, dictionary, critical thinking, and social/cultural development. In addition, they are not tied to any specific age group or grade level, though care was taken to include some activities appealing to younger children and others appealing to older children. All of them can be carried out at home with few materials and little preparation on the part of the parents. In short, *Letters to Parents: ESL* is ideal for the busy teacher who hopes to encourage parental involvement in their children's educational experience.

This book contains two versions of each letter—one in English and one in Spanish. Because the Spanish-speaking parents will be at various levels of English comprehension, it is recommended that they receive a copy of both versions to ensure clarity of understanding.

Diane Pinkley

How to Use This Book

Letters to Parents: ESL is designed to make your life as an ESL teacher easier by encouraging parental assistance with skills development on the part of your ESL students. Each of the activities suggested in the letters has been chosen to reinforce one or more of the following skill areas: listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, dictionary, critical thinking, and social/cultural development. Most of the activities require little or no preparation on the part of the parents, and all of them are designed to be interesting, challenging, and fun.

There is a total of thirty-seven letters: an Introductory Letter to the parents, and thirty-six Skills Development Letters, all of which are in English and Spanish. In addition, the book's Appendix will be very helpful to ESL students and to their parents because it contains information on basic spelling rules, pronunciation of English sounds, basic grammar terminology, and the principal parts of irregular verbs. This book also contains an evaluation form that you can send to parents from time to time during the school year to obtain feedback.

Recommended Procedure

1. At the beginning of the school year (or whenever a new ESL student joins the class), send home a copy of the Introductory Letter to the parents of each ESL child. If possible, copy the first letter onto official school stationery.
2. Each week (or almost each week) after that, send home one of the Skills Development Letters that reinforces the concepts you are working on in your classroom with your students. Send an evaluation form three to six times during the school year as well.

Preparation of the Letters

1. Photocopy one letter and sign your name at the bottom. Include the date at the top.
2. Make one copy of the letter for each student in your class and two additional copies for yourself. (Attach one copy to your weekly lesson plans and put the other in a binder, ready for students who lose their copy or for an arriving student.)
3. Send the letter home with your students on the same day of each week. (Wednesday or Thursday is good because parents then have time to plan when they will do some of the activities; they often choose the weekend.)

Helpful Tips

1. Encourage your students to get excited about working with their parents on the suggested activities. Emphasize that these activities are interesting and fun, not homework assignments. (In addition, observe family reactions to the idea. Some parents may ignore the letters completely; others may feel they cannot do them. If this happens, find out if the student has a sibling or aunt or other person who might be willing to participate. If no one is willing to work with the child, provide him or her with a simple Activity Fun book, of the type sold in supermarkets, or some other material that can be worked on independently. Encourage him or her to show you everything he or she is doing.)

2. Take advantage of the information about spelling rules, pronunciation, grammar terminology, and irregular verbs in the Appendix. Copy pages for students who need the information at hand, and make sure to copy this information for ESL parents whose English is either low-level or rusty.

3. If applicable, invite your students to bring in some of the projects they do at home for a “show and tell” session at some point during the school term.

4. If the majority of your students’ parents seem receptive to participating in the activities, try scheduling a parent workshop once or twice during the year. Provide them with more ideas to use with their children, and get their comments and suggestions on how to improve their role in working with you and your school. Be sure to show your appreciation for their efforts.

Skill Charts

The Skills Development Letters in this book are not organized according to a fixed pattern or to an increasing level of complexity. You can therefore send home letters in any order, choosing activities that complement the material being studied in your textbook.

The Skill Summary Chart shows which particular skills and strategies are presented in each skill group. The Skills Distribution Chart is a quick way of seeing which activities focus on certain skills in that group's letters. Many of the activities address more than one skill at a time. The chart can be used, then, to individualize your letter selection. For example, you may want to make sure one child works on reading but at the same time also works on critical thinking skills. A look at the chart will show you which letters address those skills together. In this way, you can select activities most appropriate for individual students' needs.

Skill Summary Chart

<p>Listening Letters distinguishing between sounds; distinguishing word endings; listening for details; listening for gist; listening for tone; intonation in questions; listening for similar meanings</p>	<p>Speaking Letters describing; giving opinions; giving commands/instructions; making suggestions; telling a story; reciting a poem/chant; pronouncing specific sounds</p>	<p>Reading Letters identifying the main idea/skimming; identifying details/scanning; predicting; making inferences; reading maps/graphics; analyzing</p>
<p>Writing Letters letter formation; describing; writing a letter; writing an ad; writing a story; writing notes; identifying topic sentences; identifying support sentences; writing an advice letter/column; paragraph organization</p>	<p>Vocabulary Letters labeling items; classifying words; matching words and definitions; guessing meaning from context; defining words; associating words; listing; memorizing words; relating forms of words</p>	<p>Grammar Letters grammar vocabulary; word order in sentences; subject-verb agreement; linking verbs with predicate adjectives; verb tenses; prepositions of place; pronoun reference; question formation; indefinite articles; gerunds and infinitives; possessive adjectives and pronouns; irregular plurals</p>
<p>Dictionary Letters scanning; associating; alternate spellings; parts of speech; using alphabetical order; guide words; homonyms; abbreviations; hyphenation; usage labels</p>	<p>Critical Thinking Letters associating; mnemonic devices; identifying cause and effect; making inferences; ranking; paraphrasing; using graphics; predicting; sequencing; comparing and contrasting; classifying</p>	<p>Social/Cultural Letters U.S. classroom expectations; recognizing and dealing with feelings; socially correct behavior choices; self-esteem; reading facial expressions and gestures; making a transition scrapbook; learning independence; using the public library; cultural sharing; fitting in; discussing values and ethics</p>

Skills Distribution Chart

Skill	Letters
Listening	Listening letters 1–4; Speaking letters 1, 2, 4; Reading letter 3; Writing letters 1, 3; Vocabulary letters 1–4; Grammar letters 2, 3; Critical Thinking letters 2, 4; Social/Cultural letters 1–4
Speaking	Speaking letters 1–4; Listening letters 2, 3; Reading letters 1, 3, 4; Writing letters 1, 2, 4; Vocabulary letters 1, 3, 4; Grammar letters 1–4; Dictionary letter 2; Critical Thinking letters 1, 2, 3; Social/Cultural Letters 1–4
Reading	Reading letters 1–4; Speaking letters 1, 4; Vocabulary letters 1, 2, 3; Grammar letter 3; Dictionary letter 3; Critical Thinking letters 1, 2, 4; Social/Cultural letters 3, 4
Writing	Writing letters 1–4; Reading letter 3; Vocabulary letters 1, 2, 4; Grammar letter 4; Critical Thinking letters 1, 3; Social/Cultural letters 3, 4
Vocabulary	Vocabulary letters 1–4; Listening letters 2, 3; Speaking letters 1–4; Grammar letter 4; Dictionary letter 2; Critical Thinking letters 3, 4; Social/Cultural letter 1
Grammar	Grammar letters 1–4; Listening letters 1, 2, 4; Writing letter 2; Dictionary letter 2
Dictionary	Dictionary letters 1–4; Speaking letters 1, 4; Reading letters 1, 4; Writing letters 2, 4; Vocabulary letter 4; Critical Thinking letter 3
Critical Thinking	Critical Thinking letters 1–4; Listening letters 1, 4; Speaking letter 1; Reading letters 2, 3, 4; Writing letters 3, 4; Vocabulary letters 1–4; Grammar letters 1, 2, 4; Dictionary letters 1, 2; Social/Cultural letters 1, 2
Social/Cultural	Social/Cultural letters 1–4; Listening letter 2; Speaking letters 1, 2, 4; Reading letters 3, 4; Writing letters 2, 4; Vocabulary letter 4

Evaluation Form

Dear Parents:

By now you have received a number of ESL Skills Development Letters listing activities to share with your child at home. These suggested activities are meant to provide your child with additional practice in the skills so important to successful language learning.

As your child's ESL teacher, I would very much appreciate hearing your reaction to these reinforcement activities. Your comments and suggestions will help me better serve your child and his or her classmates. Please take a minute or two to complete the evaluation below. Have your child return this form to me at school. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Please mark the correct column with a check (✓).

My child and I found the skills development activities to be:

Skill Activities	Excellent	Good	Average	Not Useful
Listening				
Speaking				
Reading				
Writing				
Vocabulary				
Grammar				
Dictionary				
Critical Thinking				
Social/Cultural				

Your Comments:

Signature of Parent or Guardian

Date

Cuestionario de evaluación

Estimados padres de familia:

Hasta la fecha han recibido una serie de cartas para el “Fomento de Destrezas del Inglés como Segundo Idioma” (ESL), donde aparecen varias actividades que puede realizar con su hijo o hija. Estas sugerencias tienen como fin permitirle a su hijo/a que practique en casa las destrezas básicas para aprender un idioma.

Como maestro(a) de su hijo/a de Inglés como Segundo Idioma (ESL), me gustaría conocer su opinión sobre esas actividades de refuerzo. Sus comentarios y sugerencias me ayudarán a servirle mejor a su hijo/a y a sus compañeros de clase. Por favor dedique un rato a contestar la siguiente evaluación y envíela con su hijo/a a la escuela. Agradezco su interés y participación.

Por favor, señale la columna correcta con una marca (✓).

Mi hijo/a y yo consideramos que las actividades para el fomento de destrezas son:

Tipo de actividad	Excelente	Buena	Regular	No es Útil
Habilidad de escuchar				
Conversación				
Lectura				
Escritura				
Vocabulario				
Gramática				
Uso del diccionario				
Pensamiento crítico				
Desarrollo socio/cultural				

Comentarios:

Firma del padre o guardián:

Fecha

Introductory Letter

Dear Parents,

As parents, you want the best life possible for your child. One of the most important ways you can contribute to your child's success in life is through the development of shared learning experiences that take place with the family at home. You are in a unique position to help your child achieve academic and social success through your interest, patience, and support. Because you are parents, your child already sees you as a guide and teacher in many areas, and you already play key roles in his or her growth and development. By working together, I believe that we will contribute in an important way to your child's potential for academic and social success in school and in later life.

During this school year, your child will be studying English as a Second Language along with many other subjects such as history and science. In learning English, your child will work on many different skill areas necessary for successful communication. These areas include: listening, speaking, dictionary, reading, writing, vocabulary, grammar, critical thinking, and social/cultural development. In order to help reinforce the classroom work in these areas, I will be sending to your home prepared letters that will provide you with useful, pleasurable ideas and activities to share with your child. Working together on these activities at home will strengthen your child's learning potential and increase his or her chances for success in the classroom. Please note that these ideas and activities are structured so that they do not require a great deal of your time or expensive materials and equipment. Your main contribution will be your interest, support, and satisfaction as you make an active difference in your child's potential success both in the classroom and beyond.

I look forward to working together with you this year to provide your child with the very best of educational opportunities in school and at home. Your participation and interest are valued, so please feel free to contact me with any questions or ideas that you may have. Your child is worth it!

Sincerely,

Carta de introducción

Estimados padres de familia:

Todo padre desea lo mejor para sus hijos. Una de las mejores formas de contribuir a que su hijo o hija tenga éxito en la vida es compartir en el hogar experiencias que fomenten el aprendizaje. Ustedes tienen en sus manos la oportunidad de ayudar a su hijo/a a alcanzar el éxito académico y social mediante su interés, su paciencia y su apoyo. Como padres, ustedes ya son guías y maestros de su hijo/a en muchas áreas. Ya desempeñan un importante papel en su crecimiento y desarrollo. Al trabajar juntos, considero que haremos una importante contribución al potencial de su hijo/a para que alcance el éxito académico y social tanto en la escuela como en su vida futura.

Durante este año escolar, su hijo/a estudiará Inglés como Segundo Idioma conjuntamente con muchas otras materias tales como historia y ciencias. Al aprender inglés, su hijo/a practicará diversas destrezas necesarias para una comunicación efectiva. Estas áreas incluyen habilidad de escuchar, conversación, uso del diccionario, lectura, escritura, vocabulario, gramática, pensamiento crítico y desarrollo socio/cultural. Con el fin de ayudar a reforzar el trabajo que hacemos en el salón de clase en estas áreas, les enviaré a la casa unas cartas con útiles y placenteras sugerencias y actividades para que realicen con su hijo/a. El llevar a cabo estas actividades en el hogar fomentará el potencial de aprendizaje de su hijo/a e incrementará su oportunidad de éxito en el salón de clase. Puesto que estas ideas y actividades están estructuradas, no exigirán mucho tiempo de su parte ni materiales o equipos costosos. Su principal contribución será su interés, su apoyo y la satisfacción de saber que está fomentando el éxito potencial de su hijo/a en el salón de clase y más allá del mismo.

Me complacerá trabajar con usted este año para darle a su hijo/a las mejores oportunidades educativas tanto en la escuela como en la casa. Su participación e interés es muy apreciado, así que no duden en comunicarse conmigo si tienen cualquier pregunta o idea. ¡Su hijo/a se lo merece!

Atentamente,

