

# Yes They CAN: Rigorous Writing Tasks for Low-level ESL

Mary Louise Baez, TA Consultant  
American Institutes for Research

[mlbaez@air.org](mailto:mlbaez@air.org)

# Agenda

1. Warm-up
2. How to address educational shifts with rigorous writing tasks
3. Tasks and analysis
4. Reflection
5. Commitment

# Warm-up

1. Write two answers for each category in the chat pod.

<b>Tools and scaffolds to prepare low level ESL students to write</b>	<b>Challenges low level ESL students face when writing</b>	<b>Challenges low level ESL teachers face when teaching writing</b>
<b>Provide a model</b>	Feeling daunted	Students look confused when it's time to write

# Objectives

- Discuss challenges students and teachers face incorporating rigorous writing instruction for low ESL levels
- Review three shifts in Adult Education since CCR Standards
- Consider how academic language and critical thinking aspects of rigor apply to lower levels
- Experience and analyze writing tasks and strategies (scaffolding) for incorporating rigor in low level ESL classes
- Reflect on tasks and strategies via prior teaching
- Commit to incorporating new strategies for rigorous writing tasks

# Why Incorporate Rigorous Writing Activities in my Low-level ESL Class?

## 3 educational shifts in Adult ESL

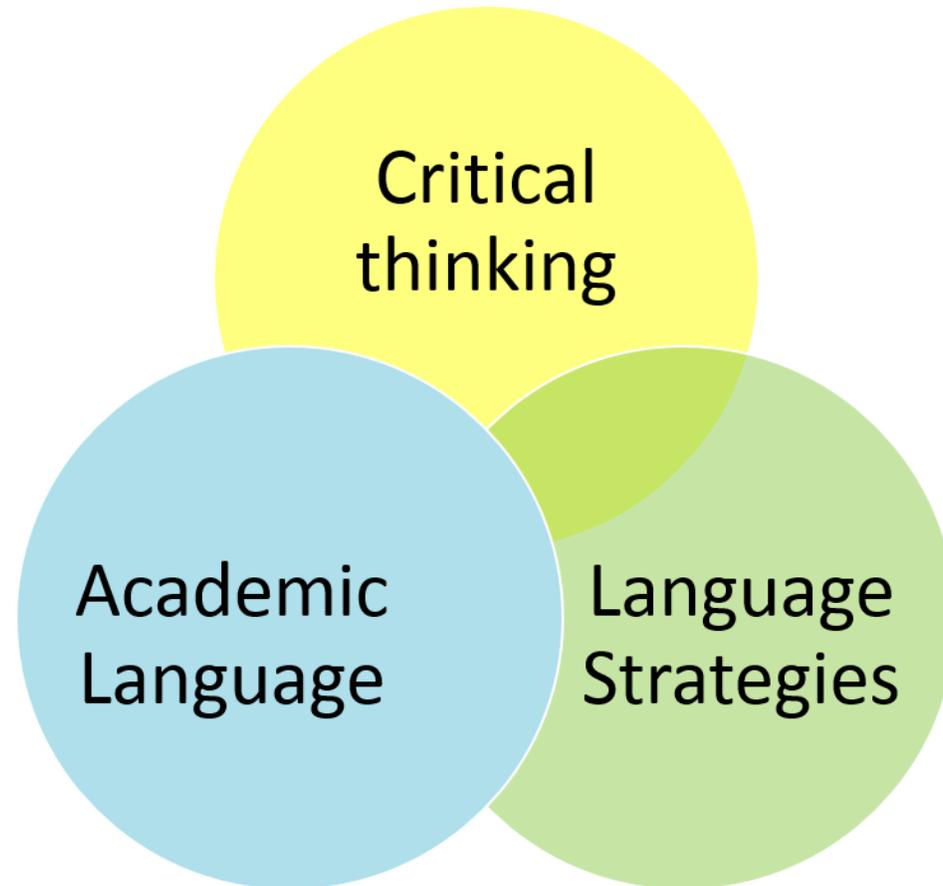
**Complexity:** Regular practice with complex text and its academic language

**Evidence:** Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational

**Knowledge:** Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction

Pimentel, S. (2013). *College and career readiness standards for adult education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Retrieved on 11/15/17 from <http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf>

# 3 Components of Rigorous Instruction



Parrish (2015) LINCS ESL PRO *Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner: Issue Brief*

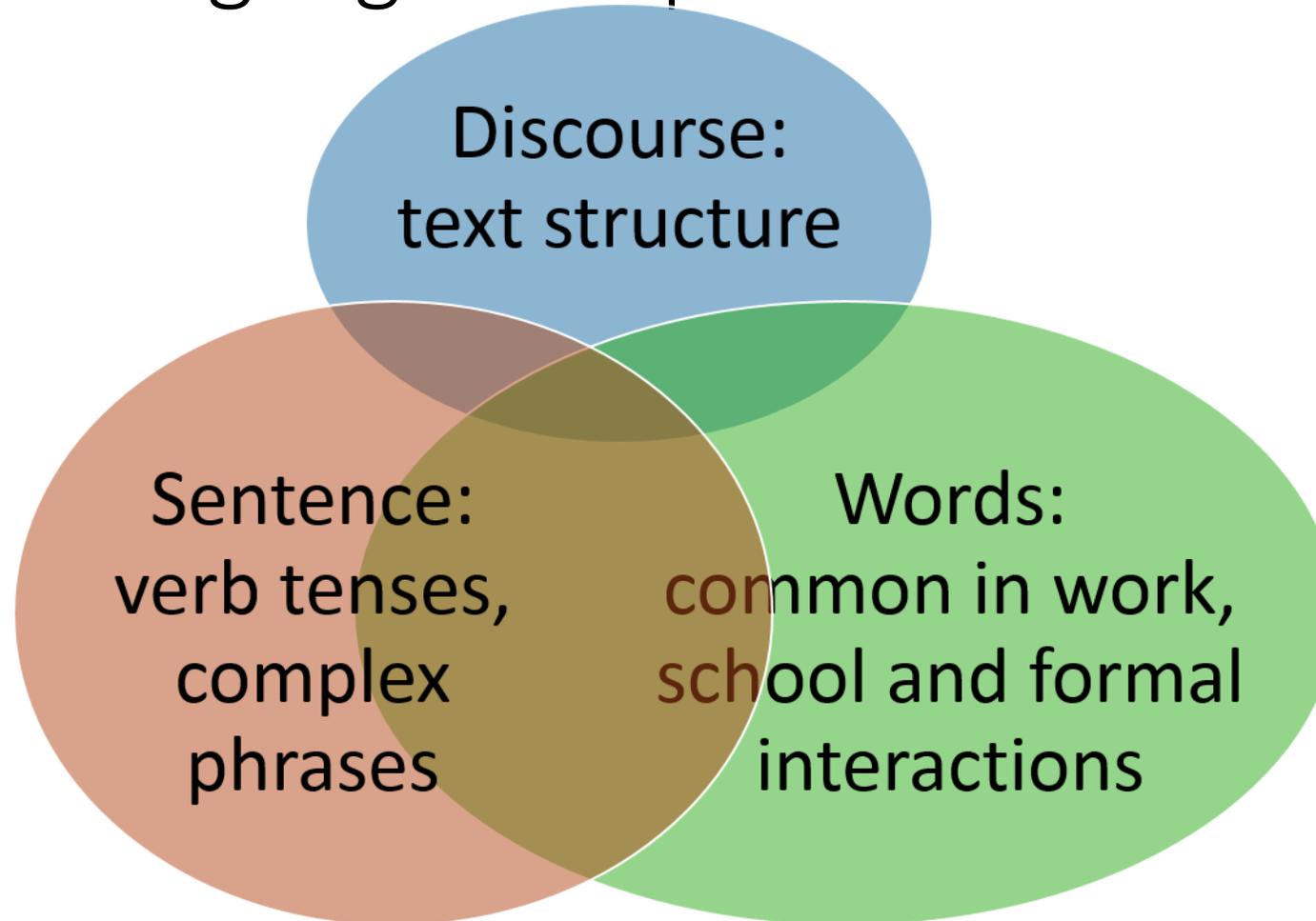
# Ways to Incorporate Rigorous Writing Activities in my Low-level ESL Class?

## ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

“... language that can be used in more complex interactions in work, community and school contexts”

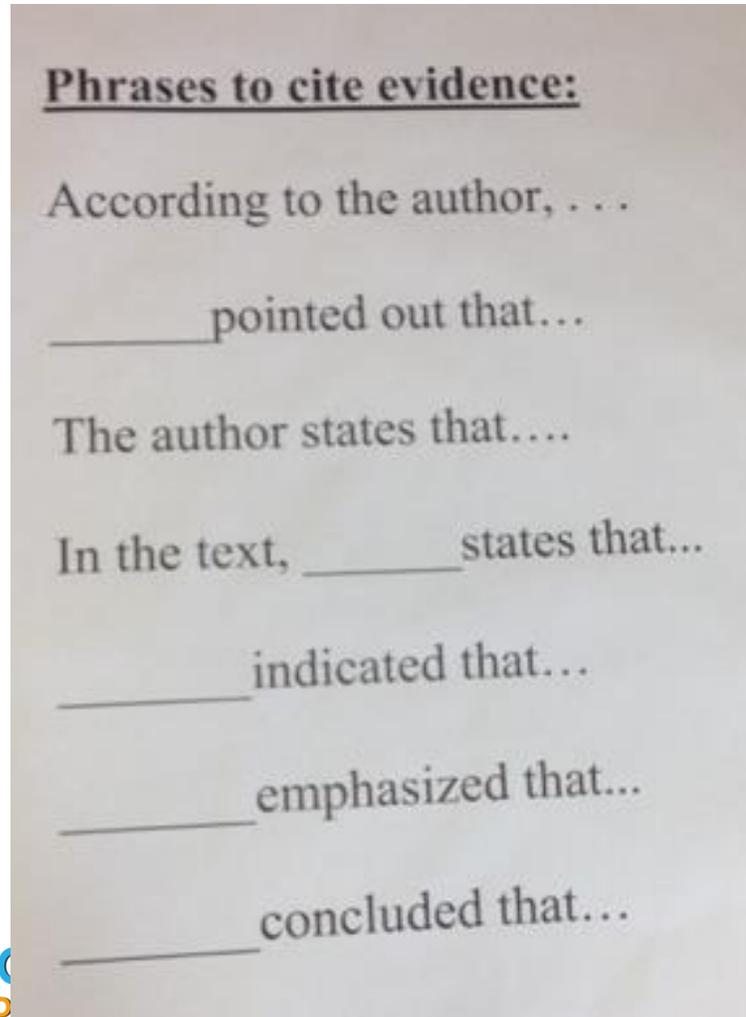
Parrish (2015) LINCES ESL PRO *Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner: Issue Brief*

# Academic Language Components



Egan (2016) *LINCS Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner Companion Learning Resource*.

# Academic Language to Cite Evidence: Respond to text dependent questions by citing evidence from text



**Poster on classroom wall**  
Courtesy of Donna Price  
SDCCD non-credit program

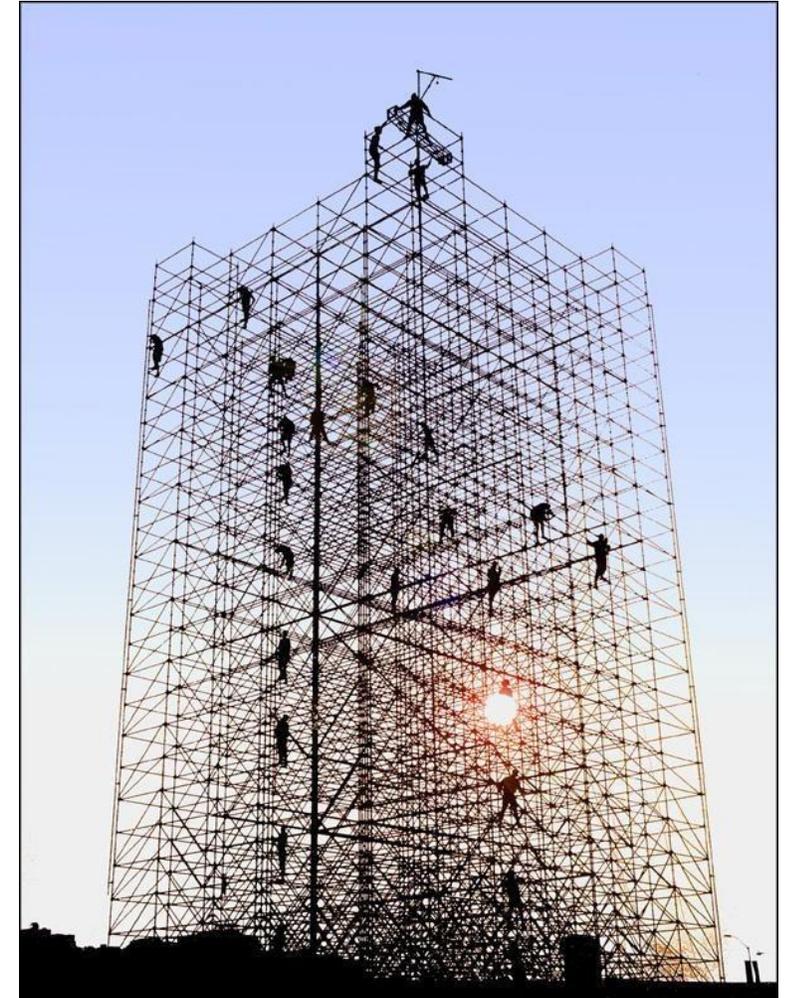
# Types of Critical Thinking Tasks

- Problem solving
- Analyze relationships
- Evaluate evidence

Parrish (2015) LINCS ESL PRO *Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner: Issue Brief*

# Ways to Scaffold Tasks

- Provide a model
- Model a “class” write (we do)
- Use visual input
- Graphic organizers illustrating the genre
- Provide sentence frames used in all productive (oral and written) tasks from the lowest levels.
- Incorporate words from the academic word list



# Same Gist, Different Words

Sylvia was born in a small town in Costa Rica. Her father had a small coffee farm where she picked coffee during school vacation. She enjoyed school and her teacher told her when she finished the third grade she should go to the city to study and become a school teacher. The expenses were too much for her family. But, she vowed that all her children would study!

When her youngest was two her husband died of cancer leaving her with 12 children. Over the years the older children provided for the younger ones to study. They also continued to work the coffee farm. When she turned 62, she was living in a city and learned that she could host foreign students. She decided it was the perfect way for her to have a job and provide a university education for her youngest three children.

# Same Gist, Different Words

Sylvia was born in a rural town in Costa Rica on her father's small coffee plantation. Together with her siblings and parents they would harvest and sell the coffee from their land and work on nearby farms as well. When she was finishing the first cycle of school, i.e. third grade, her teacher suggested she go to the city and pursue a career as a school teacher. However, the economic crisis of the 1930's would prevent her from achieving that dream. She vowed that when she became a mother her children would complete their education.

Her husband lost his battle with cancer when the youngest of their dozen children was a two-year-old toddler. As her older children finished their studies, they helped support their younger siblings. Soon they had their own families to support and Sylvia moved the remaining seven to the city for more educational opportunities. When she was 62 she became aware of an opportunity to earn income while working at home – she could host foreign exchange students. This new employment was fortuitous allowing her to provide a university education for her youngest three children and fulfill her dream.

# Same Gist, Different Words

## Task Analysis

### **ELP Standard 3: write about level-appropriate topics**

Level 1: with support can communicate information and feelings about familiar texts, topics and experiences.

Level 2: with support can compose simple written narratives or informational texts about familiar texts, topics, experiences or events.

**Academic Language:** sequencing

**Critical Thinking:** recall elements of a story, make observations, describe cause/effect, use voice appropriate to audience

**Scaffolding:** Sentence frames, brainstorm synonyms

# Letter to Self

Dear (student fills in name),

2 months ago you started your ESL class. By now, you can write full sentences and are starting to write paragraphs. You know the meaning and can use these academic words: \_\_\_\_\_

You feel more comfortable writing in English and can write a short note to your boss and new friends who don't speak \_\_\_\_\_ (list first language).

In the next two months you will be able to write a complete paragraph and messages using formal language. You will be able to differentiate between formal and informal language.

Congratulations on your commitment to improving your English!

(student signs) \_\_\_\_\_

# How Do You \_\_\_\_\_ ?

First

Next,  
Then,  
Second,

Finally,

# How Do You \_\_\_\_\_ ?

## Possible Topics

- Register for a CTE course
- Apply for a job
- Fill out your job duties for the day/ timesheet
- Perform any job task
- Register your child for school
- Apply for a mortgage
- Prepare for emergencies
- Get a library card

# How do you \_\_\_\_\_? (possible teaching steps)

- Pose the question orally and visually.
- Brainstorm everything you need to do. Do not worry about order.
- Order steps: Ss can work in pairs or small groups.
- Come together and draft the sentences using the graphic organizer with sequencing words. Provide sentence frames as needed.
- Follow the same process with a new topic. This time students work in small groups.
- Gallery walk of processes and students get post it notes to ask questions.

# How Do You \_\_\_\_? Task Analysis

## **ELP Standard 3: write about level-appropriate topics**

Level 1: with support can communicate information and feelings about familiar texts, topics and experiences.

Level 2: with support can compose simple written narratives or informational texts about familiar texts, topics, experiences or events.

**Academic Language:** sequencing

**Critical Thinking:** identify patterns of events, make observations, describe cause/effect, use voice appropriate to audience

**Scaffolding:** Discussion, brainstorming lists, numbering steps, graphic organizer

# Same Meaning, Different Audience

You need to communicate with a friend, child's teacher, boss that you are sick using these modes of communication: tweet, text message, or email.

Write a possible message to the audience assigned in the chat pods.

<b>Tweet</b>	Family or Friend
<b>Text message</b>	Colleagues OR Friends
<b>Email</b>	Supervisor

# Characteristics of Formal & Informal Registers

## Formal

- Complex sentences
- No abbreviations, slang or reductions
- Few to no contractions
- Precise language
- May not have personal relationship with audience

## Informal

- Contractions
- Idioms/slang
- Reductions (wanna, gonna)
- Abbreviations
- Level of familiarity with the audience
- Personal info

# Same Gist, Different Words

## Task Analysis

**ELP Standard 7 – adapt language choice to purpose, task and audience when writing.**

Level 1 – show emerging differences between informal and formal

Level 2 - Increasing awareness of differences between informal and formal language use; adapt language choices to audience

**Academic Language:** inform via policy for work

**Critical Thinking:** use voice appropriate to audience

**Scaffolding:** brainstorm chart for same gist, different audience

# Connecting Reading to Evidence-based Tasks

Provide a reading on an inspirational person's life.

- According to the reading, what was the person's goal?
- How did professor Claytor motivate Katherine?
- List two jobs Katherine had that were described in the article?



Retrieved on 1/16/18 from <https://newsela.com/read/bio-scientist-katherine-johnson/id/26486>

# Katherine's Timeline

Born  
West Virginia

18 graduated  
from college

Worked at  
NASA

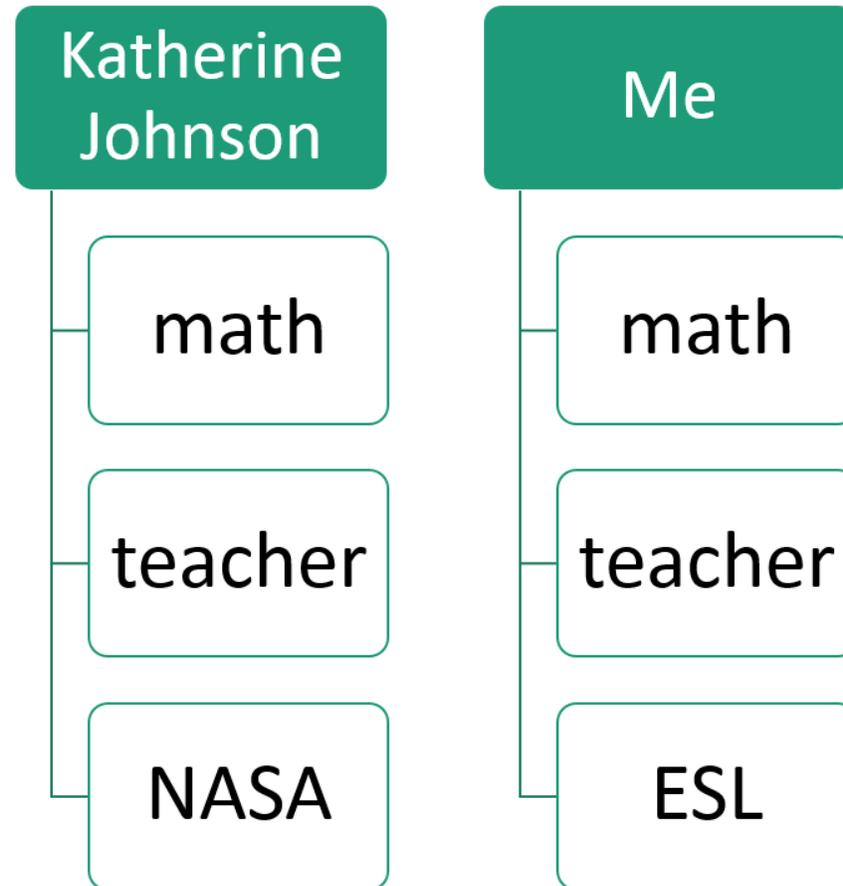
# My Timeline

Born Sacramento, CA  
Enjoyed math in  
school

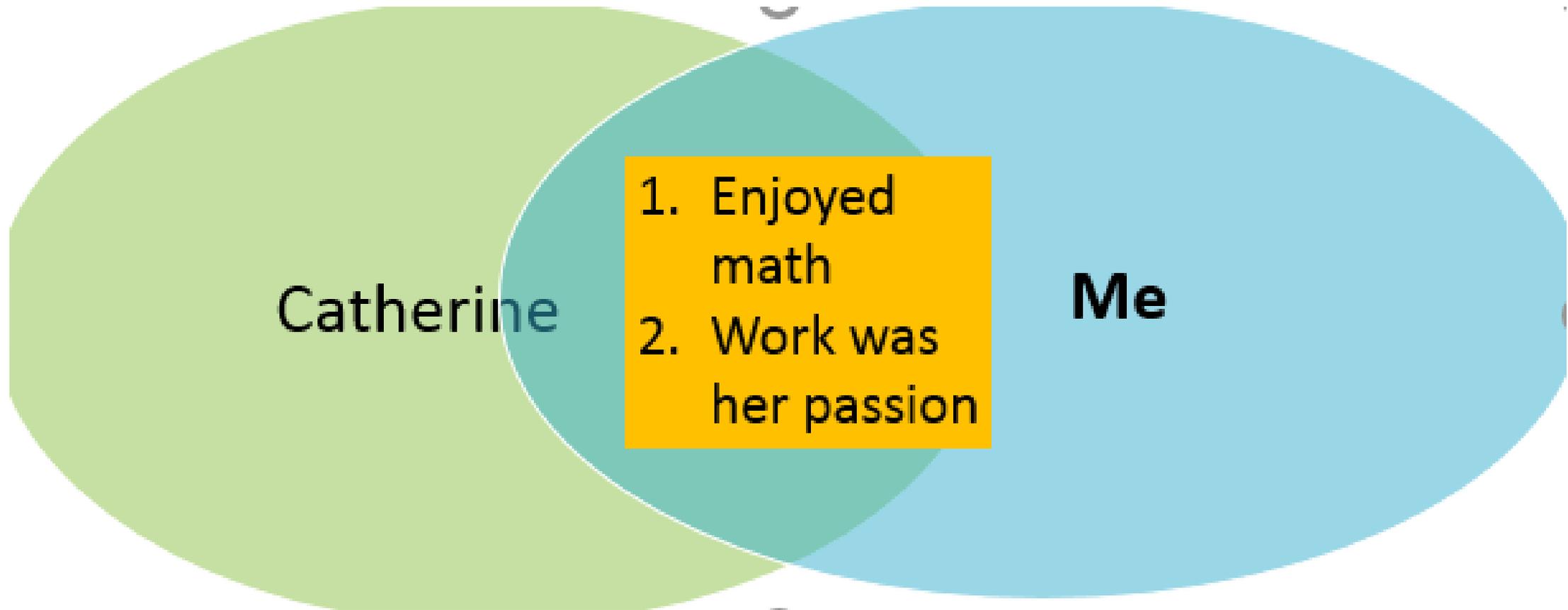
Graduated from  
College and went to  
work in Costa Rica

Taught ESL  
Traveled  
Trained teachers

# Inspirational Figure and My Life Similarities



# Similar and Different



# Connecting Reading Task Analysis

**ELP Standard 4: level-appropriate written claims and support with reasoning and evidence.**

Level 1 – give a reason for the opinion

Level 2 – introduce the topic, experience or event, provide a concluding statement

- **Critical Thinking:** Compare, draw conclusions, cite evidence
- **Academic language:** for comparison and contrast
- **Scaffold:** graphic organizers

# Guided Reflection

1. How much time do you spend on writing in class?
2. Which of these best practices do you provide?
  - scaffolds for all stages of the tasks
  - models
  - complete guided pre-writing tasks during class time
  - graphic organizers aligned to writing task
  - sentence frames
  - academic language

# Commitment to Increase Rigorous Writing Tasks

Three tasks or strategies I experienced today that I can implement.

Two tasks I plan to do next week to follow-up on this workshop.

One aspect or principle I want to learn more about.

Yes They CAN!



# Resources

- American Institutes for Research. (2016) *English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education*. Retrieved 12/1/2017 from <https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/elp-standards-adult-ed.pdf>
- Aungst, Gerald. (2014) *Using Webb's Depth of Knowledge to Increase Rigor* Retrieved 12/28/17 from <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/webbs-depth-knowledge-increase-rigor-gerald-aungst>
- Coxhead, Averil. (2017) TESOL colloquium "*Teaching and Assessing Vocabulary: What the Research Shows*" Seattle, WA.
- Egan, Patsy. (2016) *LINCS Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner Companion Learning Resource*. Retrieved 10/5/2017 from: [https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/LINCS\\_CLR-3\\_508.pdf](https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/LINCS_CLR-3_508.pdf)
- Kinsella, Kate. (2017) CATESOL Regional Plenary "You Can't Write What You Can't Say!" San Diego, CA.
- Parrish, Betsy. (2015) *Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner: Issue Brief*. Retrieved 10/12/2017 from: [https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ELL\\_Increasing\\_Rigor\\_508.pdf](https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ELL_Increasing_Rigor_508.pdf)
- Pimentel, S. (2013). *College and career readiness standards for adult education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Retrieved on 11/15/17 from <http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf>