

# Supporting Independence Without Removing Safety

A Practical Guide for CLB 1L / ESL Literacy Teachers

## Who This Resource Is For

This resource is designed for:

- ESL Literacy teachers (CLB 1L)
- Teachers new to teaching adult literacy
- LINC instructors working with pre-benchmark learners
- Teachers unsure when or how to fade scaffolds

You do not need prior PBLA expertise to use this tool. This guide supports thinking, observing, and planning — not testing or rushing learners.

## How to Use This Resource

You can use this tool:

- during lessons
- while observing learners
- during planning time
- at the end of the week for reflection
- when deciding whether to reduce support

You do not need to use every section at once. Start with Section 1 and Section 2 if you are new.

## Section 1: What Independence REALLY Looks Like at CLB 1L

At the CLB 1L / ESL Literacy level, independence does NOT mean working alone.

Many new teachers believe independence means:

- no visuals
- no teacher modeling
- no sentence frames
- learners working silently

This belief often leads to learner confusion and anxiety.

### A More Accurate Definition of Independence at CLB 1L

Independence at CLB 1L means the learner increasingly initiates, chooses, and attempts tasks — even while support is still present.

Support is not removed suddenly. Support changes gradually.

### What Independence May Look Like in Real Classrooms

- Learner looks at a picture before speaking
- Learner repeats a model before trying alone
- Learner follows a routine with visual steps
- Learner copies words instead of writing freely

Examples of Independence at CLB 1L:

- Learner points to the correct picture without prompting
- Learner starts an activity when materials are handed out
- Learner says one word without being asked
- Learner tries again after making a mistake
- Learner chooses between two options

**Key Reminder:** Independence is often quiet and subtle at the literacy level.

## Section 2: Readiness Observation Checklist

Readiness should be observed over time, not assumed based on lesson plans, calendar dates, unit completion, or expectations from higher CLB levels.

Readiness should be observed over time, not assumed based on:

- lesson plans
- calendar dates
- unit completion
- expectations from higher CLB levels

### **A Learner May Be Showing Readiness When They:**

- anticipate routines  
Example: Learner opens notebook when class begins without being told.
- begin tasks with less hesitation  
Example: Learner picks up pencil and starts tracing immediately.
- initiate language or actions  
Example: Learner says “wash hands” before the teacher models it.
- recover from mistakes  
Example: Learner erases and tries again instead of stopping.
- accept feedback and continue  
Example: Learner nods and repeats after correction.
- use supports purposefully  
Example: Learner looks at the picture only when unsure, not constantly.

### Reflection for Teachers:

- What does this learner do without my help?
- Which supports are helping vs. being depended on?
- Is the learner confident or anxious when support is reduced?

**Important Rule:** One moment of success does not equal readiness. Look for patterns.

## Section 3: Skill-by-Skill Independence

Independence does not develop evenly across listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

A learner may:

- understand spoken language but struggle to write
- speak confidently but not read independently
- recognize words but not spell them

This is normal at CLB 1L.

### Skill-by-Skill Tracking Tool

Use this chart to track independence separately:

- **Listening:** follows routine instructions; responds to familiar questions
- **Speaking:** uses single words independently; attempts speech without prompting
- **Reading:** recognizes familiar words; matches words to pictures
- **Writing:** traces letters; copies words; writes letters independently

Use this grid to track independence skill by skill.

| Skill     | Emerging                 | Developing               | More Independent         | Notes |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| Listening | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Speaking  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Reading   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |
| Writing   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ |

### Guiding Questions:

- Which skill shows the most confidence?
- Which skill still needs strong scaffolds?
- Are expectations aligned to the learner's strongest skill?

### Reminder:

A learner may be independent in one skill and not another — this is normal.

**Teacher Tip:** Never fade writing support just because listening is strong.

## Section 4: Fading Scaffolds Gradually

*(What to Reduce First — What to Keep Longer)*

Fading support is a **process**, not an event.

Scaffolds should be reduced one at a time.

Removing too many supports at once often causes:

- confusion
- shutdown
- loss of confidence

### **Supports Often Reduced First (Slowly):**

- number of verbal prompts
- length of sentence frames
- teacher pointing
- tracing → copying

Example:

Instead of removing sentence frames completely:

“I see a \_\_\_\_.” → “I see...” → free word choice later

### **Supports Often Kept Longer:**

- visual supports
- familiar routines
- modeled examples
- predictable task formats

Example:

Keep the same worksheet layout even when difficulty increases.

**Rule of Thumb:** Change the task, not the routine.

### **Key Principle:**

Reduce one support at a time while keeping success visible.

## Section 5: Supporting Risk-Taking Without Anxiety

Learners take risks when the classroom feels safe.

Literacy learners often carry:

- past school trauma
- fear of mistakes
- fear of embarrassment

Confidence grows when **risk feels safe**.

### Supportive Teacher Language:

#### Use:

- “Try.”
- “It’s okay.”
- “Let’s do it together.”
- “You can choose.”
- “Good try.”

#### Avoid

- “You should know this.”
- “We already did this.”
- “No, that’s wrong.”

### Teacher Behaviours That Support Confidence:

- offering choices
- normalizing mistakes
- praising effort
- maintaining routines
- giving time to respond

Confidence grows when risk feels safe.

## Section 6: Weekly Teacher Reflection

Use this section at the end of the week or unit.

### Reflection Questions:

- Where did I see independence emerging this week?
- Which supports were essential?
- Which supports could begin to fade?
- Which learners need more time?
- What evidence supports my decisions?

**Final Reminder:** Independence grows through careful observation, not pressure.